



Servants'

Preparation Program



Coptic Orthodox
Diocese of the
Southern
United States

*"For I have given you an example,
that you should do as I have done to you"
John 13:15*

Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States of America

COMMENTARY ON THE HOLY BOOK OF GENESIS

BY

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OT 101

Servants' Preparation Program

2002

High School Boys (July 22 – 26)

High School Girls (July 26 – 30)

College (August 6 – 10)

Nashville, TN

Introduction

1. Title

The title “Genesis” is a transliteration of the Greek word, which is the title of the book of Genesis in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew text, the word *Bereshith*, is the first word of the text, being translated, “in the beginning.”?

2. Authorship

Traditionally, Moses has been held to be the author of Genesis over the centuries. It would appear from a number of passages (Exodus 17:14; 24:4; 34:27; Leviticus 1:1; 4:1; 6:1,8,19,24; 7:22,28) that Moses wrote the other books of the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). It would indeed be unusual for the first word of Exodus to be “and” unless Moses wrote it as well. In the New Testament, our Lord seemingly attributes the Pentateuch to Moses (Matt 8:4; 19:7,8; Mark 1:44; 7:10; 10:3,4; Luke 5:14; 16:29,31; John 5:45,46; 7:22,23). Other New Testament writers follow this same approach (Acts 3:22, 13:39; Rom 10:5,19; I Cor 9:9; II Cor 3:15).

3. The Outline of the Book of Genesis

The first division of the book, chapters 1-11, can be summarized by four major events: the creation (chapters 1-2), the fall (chapters 3-5), the flood (chapters 6-9), and the confusion of languages of the tower of Babel. The last division of Genesis, chapters 12-50, can be remembered by its four main characters: Abraham (12:1-25:18), Isaac (25:19-26:35), Jacob (27-36), and Joseph (37-50).

The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth (Genesis 1:1-2:3)

1. Genesis 1:1-3

Many interpretations exist for the first three verses of the Bible, but we will briefly mention the two most popularly held by evangelicals.

View 1: The Initial Chaos Theory. Briefly, this view holds that verse one would be an independent introductory statement. Verse 2 would describe the state of the initial creation as unformed and unfilled. In other words the universe is like an untouched block of granite before the sculptor begins to fashion it. The creation is not in an evil state, as the result of some catastrophic fall, but merely in its initial unformed state, like a lump of clay in the potter’s hands. Verses 3 and following begin to describe God’s working and fashioning of the mass, transforming it from chaos to cosmos. The orthodox scholars hold this position.

View 2: The Re-creation (or Gap) Theory. This view maintains that Genesis 1:1 describes the original creation of the earth, prior to the fall of Satan (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12ff). As a result of Satan’s fall the earth lost its original state of beauty and bliss and is found in a state of chaos in Genesis 1:2.

2. The Six Days of Creation (1:1-31)

Formlessness Changed to Form			Emptiness Changed to Habitation		
vv 3-5	Day 1	Light	vv 14-19	Day 4	Luminaries (sun, moon, stars)
vv 6-8	Day 2	Air (upper expanse) Water (lower expanse)	vv 20-23	Day 5	Fish, Birds
vv 9-13	Day 3	Dry land plants	vv 24-31	Day 6	Animals, Man

3. The Meaning of Creation

The creation account describes the character and attributes of God.

- **God is sovereign and all-powerful.** Distinct from the cosmogonies of other ancient peoples, there is no creation struggle described in Genesis one. God does not overcome opposing forces to create the earth and man. God creates with a mere command, “Let there be ...” There is order and progress. God does not experiment, but rather skillfully fashions the creation of His omniscient design.
- **God is no mere force, but a Person.** While we must be awed by the transcendence of God, we should also be His immanence. He is no distant cosmic force, but a personal ever-present God. This is reflected in the fact that He creates man in His image (1:26-28). Man is a reflection of God. Our personhood is a mere shadow of God’s. In chapter two God provided Adam with a meaningful task and with a counterpart as a helper. In the third chapter we learn that God communed with man in the garden daily (cf. 3:8).
- **God is eternal.** While other creations are vague or erroneous concerning the origin of their gods, the God of Genesis is eternal. The creation account describes His activity at the beginning of time (from a human standpoint).
- **God is good.** The creation did not take place in a moral vacuum. Morality was woven into the fabric of creation. Repeatedly, the expression is found “it was good.” Good implies not only usefulness and completion, but also moral value. Those who hold to atheistic views of the origin of the earth see no value system other than what is held by the majority of people. God’s goodness is reflected in His creation, which, in its original state, was good. Even today, the graciousness and goodness of God is evident (Matt 5:45; Acts 17:22-31).

The Meaning of Man: His Duty and His Delight (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:4-25)

1. Man’s Dignity (1:26-31)

Man is the crown of God’s creative program. This is evident in several particulars. First, man is the last of God’s creatures. Second, man alone is created in the image of God “And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:27)”. Man, as distinct from animals, is made in the image and likeness of God. What distinguishes man from animal must therefore be a part of His reflection of God. Man’s ability to reason, to communicate, and to make moral decisions must be a part of this distinction. Further, man reflects God in the fact that he rules over creation.

God is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. He has delegated a small portion of His authority to man in the rule of creation.

One more point should be made here. There seems to be little doubt that in the provision God has made for man's food, only vegetarian foods are included at this time: Then God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life; I have given every green plant for food; and it was so (Genesis 1:29-30). It was not until after the fall, and perhaps after the flood, that meat was given as food for man (cf. Genesis 9:3-4). Shedding of blood would have significance only after the fall, as a picture of coming redemption through the blood of Christ. In the Millennium we are told, "The wolf and the lamb shall graze together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain, says the Lord (Isaiah 65:25)". The Millennium will be a return to things as they once were before the fall. Thus, in the paradise of Eden, Adam and Eve and the animal kingdom were all vegetarians. Any view of man's origin which does not view man as the product of divine design and purpose, cannot attribute to man the worth which God has given him. To put it another way, our evaluation of man is directly proportionate to our estimation of God.

2. Man's Duty (2:4-17)

Into this paradise of Eden, man was placed. While he was surely to enjoy this wonderland, he was also to cultivate it. Look again at verse 5: Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth; and there was no man to cultivate the ground (Genesis 2:5). When placed in the garden, Adam was to work there: "Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15).

Adam's creation is described more fully in 2:7 than in chapter one. He was formedⁱ from the dust of the ground. While this is a humbling fact, it is also obvious that man's origin is not from the animal world, nor is man created in the same way as the animals. In part, Adam's dignity stems from the fact that his life breath is the inspiration of God (verse 7). Here was no mythical garden. Every part of the description of this paradise inclines us to understand that it was a real garden in a particular geographical location. Specific points of reference are given. Four rivers are named; we know two of which today. We should not be surprised, especially after the cataclysmic event of the flood, that changes may have occurred, which would make it impossible to locate this spot precisely. God described Israel as a cultivated garden, a vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-2ff.). The Lord Jesus spoke of Himself as the Vine and we as the branches. The Father tenderly cared for His vineyard (John 15:1). St. Paul described the ministry as the work of a farmer (II Timothy 2:6).

3. Man's Delight (2:18-25)

Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him' (Genesis 2:18). Adam's mate was to be a very special creation, a 'helper, suitable for him' (verse 18). She was to be a 'helper,' not a slave, and not an inferior. The Hebrew word *ezer* is most interesting. In Exodus 18:4 this was the name Moses gave to one of his sons. "And the other was named Eliezer (El=God), for he said, 'The God of my father was my help (*ezer*), and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh' (Exodus 18:4)". The other three times *ezer* is found used by Moses in Deuteronomy (33:7,26,29), it refers to God as man's helper. So also in the Psalms (20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 89:19; 115:9; 121:1,2; 124:8; 146:5). The point of the word as it is most often employed in the Old Testament is that the

help given implies no inferiority whatsoever. In a way consistent with its usage, God is helping man through women. What a beautiful thought. Just as Eve was fashioned so as to correspond to Adam in a physical way, so she complimented him socially, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally.

God put Adam in a deep sleep, and from his rib and attached fleshⁱⁱ fashioned the woman. He then presented the woman to the man. In this expression there is a mixture of relief, ecstasy, and delighted surprise. “This (for Adam has not yet named her) is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (verse 23). The name of Adam’s mate is woman. In Hebrews, man would be pronounced *'ish*; woman would be *'ishshah*. While the sounds are similar, the roots of the two words are different. Appropriately *'ish* may come from a parallel Arabic root, conveying the idea of ‘exercising power,’ while the term *'ishshah* may be derived from an Arabic parallel, meaning ‘to be soft’.

The divinely inspired commentary of verse 24 is of utmost import: For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). From the account it is imperative that a man leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife. What is the relationship between this command to leave and cleave and the creation of women? Verse 24 begins, “For this cause ...” What cause is this? We can understand the reason only when we explain the command. Man is to leave his parents, not in the sense of avoiding his responsibility to them (e.g. Mark 7:10-13; Ephesians 6:2,3), but in the sense of being dependent upon them. He must cease to live under their headship and begin to function alone as the head of a new home. The woman is not commanded similarly because she simply transfers from one head to another. While she once was subject to her father, now she is joined to her husband.

The Fall of Man (Genesis 3:1-24)

1. Man’s Sin (3:1-7)

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made” (Genesis 3:1). While it was an actual snake, later revelation informs us that the beast was being used by Satan, who is described as a dragon and serpent (II Corinthians 11:3; Revelation 12:9; 20:2). Satan may manifest himself as an “angel of light” (II Corinthians 11:14). Satan often stands behind the pulpit, holding a Bible in his hand. Satan’s initial approach is to deceive, not deny; to cause doubts, not disobedience. Satan came to Eve as an inquirer. Satan erroneously stated God’s command. He stated the question so as to appear that he was misinformed and needed to be corrected. Eve has begun to walk the path of disobedience while supposing that she was defending God to the serpent. His question brought the forbidden tree to the center of Eve’s thinking, but without any mention of it. She brought it up. By his question Satan has not only engaged Eve in dialogue, but he has also taken her eyes off of the generous provisions of God and caused her to think only of God’s prohibition. Satan does not wish us to ponder the grace of God, but to grudgingly meditate upon His denials. And this is precisely what has imperceptibly taken place in Eve’s thinking. Eve has revealed her change of attitude by several ‘Freudian slips.’ While God said, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely” (2:16), Eve said, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat” (3:2). Eve omitted “any” and “freely,” the two words which emphasized the generosity of God. Likewise Eve had a distorted impression of the severity of God in prohibiting the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She expressed God’s instruction in these words: “You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die” (3:3). But God had said, “But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die” (2:17). While exaggerating the prohibition to the point where even touching the tree was evil, Eve had unconsciously downplayed the judgment of God by omitting the word ‘surely,’

and by failing to report that death would come on the day of the offense. In other words, Eve emphasized God's severity, but underestimated the fact that judgment would be executed surely and soon. Satan's first attack on the woman was that of a religious seeker, in an effort to create doubts about the goodness of God and to fix her attention on what was forbidden as opposed to all that was freely given. The second attack is bold and daring. Now in place of deception and doubt there is denial, followed by the slander of God's character: "And the serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die!'" (Genesis 3:4). Satan's fatal blow is recorded in verse 5: "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). In other words, they are living in a state of incompleteness, of inadequacy. But once the fruit is eaten, they would enter into a new and higher level of existence: they would become "like God."

Satan, I believe, leaves Eve with her thoughts at this point. His destructive seeds have been planted. While she has not yet eaten the fruit, she has already begun to fall. She has entered into a dialogue with Satan and now she is entertaining blasphemous thoughts about God's character. She is seriously contemplating disobedience. Sin is not instantaneous, but sequential (James 1:13-15), and Eve is well on her way. Notice that the tree of life is not even mentioned or considered. Here before Eve were the two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Seemingly it was not a choice between the one and the other. She only saw the forbidden fruit. It, alone, appeared to be 'good for food and a delight to the eyes' (verse 6), and yet in 2:9 we were told that all the trees had these features in common. But Eve had eyes only for what was forbidden. And this tree offered some mysterious quality of life, which appealed to the woman. Satan lied outright in assuring Eve that she would not die, she finally determined that the benefits were too great and the consequences were unreasonable and therefore unlikely. At that moment she snatched the fruit and ate it. "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eye, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6)".

Verses 7 and 8 are particularly informative, because they instruct us that sin has its consequences as well as its punishment. God has not yet prescribed any punishment for the sins of Adam and Eve, and yet the consequences are inseparably coupled with the crime. The consequences of sin mentioned here are shame and separation. The nakedness which Adam and Eve shared without guilt was now a source of shame. Sweet innocence was lost forever. Remember, there was no man in the garden but the two of them. But they were ashamed to face each other without clothing. Not only could they not face each other as they had before, but they dreaded facing God. When He came to have sweet fellowship with them, they hid themselves in fear. While the process of physical death began on that fateful day, they did not die physically. Let us recall that spiritual death is separation from God: And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (II Thessalonians 1:9). The spiritual death of Adam and Eve occurred immediately, there was now a separation from God. And this separation was not one imposed by God; it was initiated by men.

Adam is first sought by God with the question, "where are you?" (Verse 9). Adam reluctantly admitted his shame and fear, probably hoping that God would not press him on this issue. But God probed more deeply, seeking an admission of wrongdoing: "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Verse 11). Thrusting at least a part of the responsibility back upon the Creator, Adam blurted out, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (verse 12). Both Eve and God must share in the responsibility for the fall, Adam implied. His part was mentioned last and with as little detail as possible. Then Eve is questioned, "What is this you have

done?” (Verse 13). Her response was little different (in essence) than her husband’s: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (verse 13). It was true, of course. The serpent did deceive her (I Timothy 2:14), and she did eat. The guilt of both, while a feeble effort to excuse or at least diminish human responsibility was made, had been clearly established. uch must always be the case, I believe. Before punishment can be meted out, the wrong-doing must be proven and acknowledged. Otherwise punishment will not have its corrective effect on the guilty. The penalties are now prescribed by God, given in the order of the events of the fall.

2. The Serpent Sentenced (vss. 14-15)

The serpent is first addressed and its punishment established. The creature, as the instrument of Satan, is cursed and subject to an existence of humiliation, crawling in the dust (verse 14). Verse 15 addresses the serpent behind the serpent, Satan, the deadly dragon: “And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; ...” (Rev 12:9). There is to be, first of all, a personal animosity between Eve and the serpent: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman” (verse 15). Such enmity is easy to comprehend. But this opposition will broaden: “And between your seed and her seed” (verse 15). Here, I believe God refers to the battle of the centuries between the people of God and the followers of the devil (John 8:44). Finally, there is the personal confrontation between the seedⁱⁱⁱ of Eve, the Messiah, and Satan: “He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (verse 15). In this confrontation Satan will be mortally wounded while the Messiah will receive a painful, but not fatal wound. How beautifully this prophecy portrays the coming Savior, Who will reverse the events of the fall. This is that of which Paul wrote in retrospect in the fifth chapter of Romans: Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam’s offense, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:14-17).

3. The Woman’s Penalty (vs. 16)

It is only fitting that since Satan attacked mankind through the woman that God would bring about man’s salvation and Satan’s destruction through her. This has already been revealed to Satan in verse 15. Every child born to woman must have troubled Satan. While salvation would come through the birth of a child, it would not be a painless process. The Messiah would be born through her. In addition to labor pains, the woman’s relationship to her husband was prescribed. Adam should have led and Eve should have followed. But such was not the case in the fall. Therefore, from this time on women were to be ruled by men: “Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (verse 16).

For those who refuse to submit to the biblical teaching concerning the role of women in the church—that women must not lead or teach men, and not even speak publicly (I Corinthians 14:33b-36; I Timothy 2:9-15)—let me say this. The role of women in the church and in marriage is not restricted to St. Paul’s teaching, nor is it to be viewed as only related to the immoral context of Corinth. It is a biblical doctrine, which has its origin in the third chapter of Genesis. That is why St. Paul wrote, Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says

(I Corinthians 14:34). To those men and women who wish to disregard God's instruction I must say, that is precisely what Satan desires. Just as he drew Eve's attention to the restriction of the one tree, so he wants women to ponder the restriction placed upon women today. "Throw off your shackles," he urges, "Find self-fulfillment." "God is keeping you from what is best," he whispers. And it is a lie! God's rules have reasons, whether we understand them or not. For the men, this text is not for male superiority or for some kind of dictatorship in marriage. We are to lead by love. Our leadership is to be at our own personal sacrifice, seeking what is best for our wife (Ephesians 5:25ff). Biblical leadership is that patterned after our Lord (Philippians 2:1-8).

4. The Punishment of Men (vss. 17-20)

Just as Eve's punishment related to the center of her life, so is the case with Adam. He had been placed in the garden, now he will have to earn a living from the ground "by the sweat of his brow" (verses 17-19). Not only will Adam have to battle the ground to earn a living, he will eventually return to dust. Spiritual death has already occurred (cf. verses 7-8). Physical death has begun. Apart from the life which God gives, man will simply (though slowly) return to his original state—dust (2:7). Adam's response to God's penalties and promise is revealed in verse 20: "Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living." I believe this act evidenced a simple faith on the part of Adam. He accepted his guilt and punishment, but focused upon the promise of God that through the offspring of woman the Savior would come. Eve's salvation (and ours as well!) would come through her submission to her husband and through the bearing of children. Adam's naming the woman, Eve, which means 'living' or 'life' showed that life would come through Eve. God is not just a God of penalties, but of gracious provision. Thus, He made for Adam and his wife garments from the skins of animals to cover their nakedness. A veiled prophecy of redemption through the shedding of blood.

5. A Severe Mercy (3:22-24)

Satan's promise had, in a backhanded way, come true. Adam and Eve had, in a sense, become like God in the knowing of good and evil (verse 22). But there is a great difference as well as some similarity. Both man and God knew good and evil, but in a vastly different way. Perhaps the difference can best be illustrated in this way. A doctor can know of cancer by virtue of his education and experience as a doctor. That is, he has read of cancer, heard lectures on cancer, and seen it in his patients. A patient, also, can know of cancer, but as its victim. While both know of cancer, the patient would wish he had never heard of it. Such is the knowledge which Adam and Eve came to possess. God had promised salvation to come in time through the birth of Messiah, who would destroy Satan. It would seem that had Adam and Eve eaten of the tree of life they would have lived forever (verse 22). This is the reason God sent them out of the garden (verse 23). In verse 24 the 'sending out' of the two is more dramatically called 'driving out.' Stationed at the entrance of the garden are the cherubim and the flaming sword. God was merciful and gracious in putting Adam and Eve out of the garden. He kept them from eternal punishment. Their salvation would not come in a moment, but in time, not easily, but through pain—but it would come. They must trust Him to accomplish it.

The Fruits of the Fall (Genesis 4:1-26)

1. The Fruit of the Fall in the Life of Cain (4:1-24)

The sexual union of Adam and Eve produced a first child, a son whom Eve named Cain. The Hebrew word, *Qanah* means 'to get' or 'to acquire.' The significance of the name is that it reflects Eve's faith,

for she said, “I have gotten (*Qaniti*, from *Qanah*) a manchild with the help of the Lord” (Genesis 4:1). Her second son, Abel, his name meant ‘vanity,’ ‘breath,’ or ‘vapor.’ Cain was the symbol of Eve’s hope; Abel, of her despair. Abel was a keeper of flocks, while Cain was a tiller of the soil. Cain’s problem is not to be found in his means of livelihood, but in the man himself: So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard ... (Genesis 4:3-5). Cain’s offering fell short of God’s requirements of the Law. While we do not know what God revealed to Adam or to his sons regarding offering of sacrifices, we are assured that they knew what they were to do. This is clear from God’s words to Cain: Then the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it (Genesis 4:6-7). Cain’s problem was not one of lack of instruction, but of insurrection and rebellion against God.

Cain, like so many people today, wanted to come to God, but he wanted to do it his way. This may work at the hamburger stand. They may let you do it ‘your way’ as the commercial says, but God will not. ‘You can go to heaven God’s way, or you can go to hell any way you please. Notice that Cain was not an irreligious person. He believed in God, and he wanted God’s approval. But he wanted to come to God on his terms, not on God’s. Cain did not want to approach God through shed blood. Cain preferred to offer God the fruit of his labors. He had a green thumb, and bloodstained hands had no appeal to him. Men today differ little. Many are those who, like the demons (James 2:19), believe in God, and who acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. But they refuse to submit to Him as Lord. They refuse His sacrificial and substitutionary death upon the cross as the payment for their sins. They wish to come to God on their own terms. The message of the gospel is very clear: there is no approach to God except through that which Christ has earned through the death of the cross. Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me’ (John 14:6). How gracious God was to seek out Cain and to gently confront him with his sinful anger. How clear was the message of restoration and the warning concerning the danger he faced. But the counsel of God was rejected. One thing must be clear. It was not just the sacrifice that was the problem. Much more, it was the person who sought to present the offering. Moses tells us, And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering, but for Cain and his offering He had no regard (verse 4b, 5).

The source of the problem was Cain, and the symptom was the sacrifice. Verse 7 shows implications: If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it (Genesis 4:7). The way to get over his depression was to change his performance. He would feel better as he did better. In one sense Cain was right in being angry with himself. He was wrong in his animosity toward his brother and his God. When the two men were in the open, Cain killed his brother. God now came to Cain in judgment. Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ And he said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’ (Genesis 4:9). Cain’s insolence is incredible. Not only does he lie in denying any knowledge of Abel’s whereabouts, he seems to rebuke God for the question. There may even be sarcastic play on words to the effect, “I don’t know. Shall I shepherd the shepherd?”. The ground was cursed on account of Adam and Eve (3:17). Now the earth has been stained with the blood of man, and that spilled by his brother. That blood now cries out to God for justice (4:10). God, therefore, confronts Cain with his sin. The time for repentance has passed and now the sentence is passed on Cain by the Judge of the earth. It is not the ground, which is cursed again, but it is Cain. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant

and a wanderer on the earth (Genesis 4:11-12). And Cain said to the Lord, ‘My punishment is too great to bear! Behold, Thou hast driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Thy face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and it will come about that whoever finds me will kill me’ (Genesis 4:13-14). God assured Cain that while human life meant little to him, He valued it highly. He would not even allow Cain’s blood to be shed at this time. We cannot be sure about the exact nature of the sign that was appointed for Cain. It could have been a visible mark, but it seems more likely that it may have been some kind of event that confirmed to Cain that God would not allow him to be killed. “Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold” (Genesis 4:15).

Cain settled in the land of Nod. After the birth of his son, Enoch, Cain established a city named after his child. Lamech manifests mankind at his lowest point of descent. And Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah. And Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. And his brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. As for Zillah, she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron, and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. And Lamech said to his wives, ‘Adah and Zillah, Listen to my voice, you wives of Lamech, give heed to my speech, for I have killed a man for wounding me; and a boy for striking me; if Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.’ (Genesis 4:19-24). Lamech appears to be the first to have departed from the divine ideal for marriage as described in chapter two. One wife was not sufficient for him so he took two, Adah and Zillah. Lamech brings us to the point in the history of man where sin is not only committed boldly, but boastfully. He bragged to his wives of his murder. More than this he boasted that his sin was committed against a mere youngster who had only struck him. This murder was brutal, bold, and volatile. Worst of all, Lamech shows a disdain and disregard for God’s word: “If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.” (Genesis 4:24). God had spoken these words to assure Cain that he would not be killed by the hand of man. He also warned men of the seriousness of such an act. These words were spoken to reveal the fact that God valued human life. Lamech twisted and distorted them as a boast to his violence and aggressive hostility toward man and God.

2. A Glimmer of Grace (4:25-26)

Sin surely abounded in the line of Cain, but the chapter will not end without a glimmer of the grace of God. And Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, ‘God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel; for Cain killed him.’ And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:25-26). Eve had hoped for salvation through her first son, Cain. It would surely not come from him or from his descendants. Neither could it come from Abel. But another son was given whose name, Seth, means “appointed.” Not only was he a substitute for Abel (verse 25), he was the seed through whom the Savior would be born. Seth, too, had a son, Enosh. It began to become clear that the deliverance Adam and Eve hoped for was not to be soon, but it was nevertheless certain. In the midst of a perverse and crooked generation there was a believing remnant that trusted in God and hoped for His salvation.

The Meaning of Genesis 5

Chapter 4 gives us the genealogy of Cain while in chapter 5 Moses describes the godly line of Seth, through whom the Savior will come. Technically, however, chapter 5 is not the account of the lineage of Seth, but of Adam: “ This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man, He

made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created. When Adam had lived an hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth (Genesis 5:1-3)". Cain's genealogy comes to a dead end. It begins with ungodly Cain, ends with wicked Lamech, and is 'washed out' by the flood. The whole of chapter 5 is a description of the ever-narrowing line through which Messiah will come.

The contrast spiritually between the two lines is obvious. It can easily be illustrated by the two 'Lamechs' of chapters 4 and 5. Lamech (the son of Methushael, 4:18) of Cain's lineage was the initiator of polygamy (4:19). Worse than this he was a murderer who boasted of his crime (4:23) and made light of God's words to Cain (4:24). The Lamech of chapter 5 (the son of Methuselah and the father of Noah) was a godly man. The naming of his son revealed his understanding of the fall of man and the curse of God upon the ground (cf. 5:29). It also indicated his faith that God would deliver man from the curse through the seed of Eve. I believe Lamech understood that this deliverance would specifically come through the son God had given him.

In the account of Cain's descendants no numbers were employed, while the line of Seth has a definite numerical pattern. Figures in chapter 5 typically supplied: (1) the age of the individual at the birth of the son named; (2) the years lived after the birth of the son, and (3) the age of the man at his death. Essentially the life of the person falls into two parts, B.C., and A.D.: Before the child and after the delivery of the child. This division is not without significance. The length of the lives of the men in chapter 5 is unusually long; conditions were undoubtedly different prior to the flood. The long length of life would facilitate the population of the earth. Furthermore Moses would reveal by this that man was originally intended to live many years, even after the fall. The main contrast between the lines of Cain and Seth is that of the emphasis of each. Cain's line is credited with what might be called 'worldly progress' and achievements. Cain built the first city (4:17). From his descendants came the technological and cultural contributions. Metal workers, ranchers, and musicians were of this line. Now what is it that is emphasized about the line of Seth? No mention is made of any great contributions or achievements. Two things marked out the men of chapter 5. First of all, they were men of faith (Enoch, 5:18, 21-24; Lamech, 5:28-31). These men looked back and grasped the fact that sin was the root of their troubles and travail. They looked forward to a redemption that God was to provide through their offspring. That brings us to the second contribution of these men of chapter 5—they produced godly seed through whom the purposes and program of God would continue. Now we are not told that every child of theirs was godly. But we do know that these were godly men and that through them and their children a line was continued which culminated in Noah. While the rest of mankind would be destroyed in the flood, through Noah, the human race (and more than this, the seed of Eve) would be preserved. The hope of men rested in the preservation of a godly seed.

The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men (Genesis 6:1-8)

1. Who are the 'Sons of God'?

View 1: The Merging of the Ungodly Cainite with the Godly Sethites

The 'sons of God' are generally said by those who hold this view to be the godly men of the Sethite line. The 'daughters of men' are thought to be the daughters of the ungodly Cainite. The Nephilim are the ungodly and violent men who are the product of this unholy union. Chapter four describes the ungodly gen-

eration of Cain, while in chapter five we see the godly Sethite line. In Israel, separation was a vital part of the religious responsibility of those who truly worshipped God. What took place in chapter six was the breakdown in the separation, which threatened the godly seed through whom Messiah was to be born. This breakdown was the cause of the flood, which would follow. It destroyed the ungodly world and preserved righteous Noah and his family, through whom the promise of Genesis 3:15 would be fulfilled. This is the acceptable view by orthodox scholars, however, the other two view (not acceptable by orthodox scholars) are the deposit's view and fallen angel's view.

View 2: The Despot Interpretation

Some scholars have sought to define the expression 'the sons of God' by comparing it with the languages of the Ancient Near East. It is interesting to learn that some rulers were identified as the son of a particular god. In Egypt, for example, the king was called the son of Re. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, is used for men in positions of authority: "Then his master shall bring him unto the judges who acted in God's name (Exodus 21:6)". "God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers (literally, the gods, Psalm 82:1, also 82:6)". According to this approach the 'sons of God' are nobles, aristocrats, and kings. Their sin was the same type of sin that the Cainite Lamech practiced, the sin of polygamy, particularly as it came to expression in the harem, the characteristic institution of the ancient oriental despot's court. In this transgression the 'sons of God' frequently violated the sacred trust of their office as guardians of the general ordinances of God for human conduct. In the context of Genesis 4 and 5 we do find some evidence which could be interpreted as supportive of the despot view. Cain did establish a city, named after his son Enoch (verse 4:17). Dynasties would be more easily established in an urban setting. So, also, we know that Lamech did have two wives (verse 4:19). Although this is far from a harem, it could be viewed as a step in that direction. Also the view defines 'the daughters of men' as womankind, and not just the daughters of the Cainite line. This view seems to be inadequate and not orthodoxy.

View 3: The Fallen Angel Interpretation

According to this view, the 'sons of God' of verses 2 and 4 are fallen angels, which have taken the form of masculine human-like creatures. These angels married women of the human race (either Cainites or Sethites) and the resulting offspring were the Nephilim. The Nephilim were giants with physical superiority and therefore established themselves as men of renown for their physical prowess and military might. This race of half human creatures was wiped out by the flood, along with mankind in general, who were sinners in their own right (verse 6:11,12). Also, this view is not orthodoxy as The Lord taught us the angels are spiritual creatures and sexless (Matthew 22:29-30).

2. The Meaning of Genesis 6 for Christians Today

The battle today between the sons of Satan and the sons of God (in the New Testament sense—John 1:12; Romans 8:14,19) is even more intense than it was in the days of old. Satan's doom is sealed, and his days are numbered (Matthew 8:29). Second, let us learn that Satan attacks us through similar instruments today. Satan still works through men:"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds (II Corinthians 11:13-15)". Just as Satan sought to corrupt men by disclosing himself (or rather, his angels) in the form of superior human beings, so he works through 'angels of light' today.

Finally, notice that Satan does his best work in the very areas where men and women place their hope of salvation. Only faith in the God of the Bible and, specifically, faith in the Son He has sent will give you immortality and liberate you from the curse. The only way to become a Son of God is through the Son of God: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me' (John 14:6)."

The Flood (Genesis 6:9-8:22)

1. Preparation (6:9-7:5)

Broadly speaking this section deals with the necessary preparations for the flood. The reasons for the flood are given in verses 9-12. Revelation concerning the flood is given to Noah in verses 13-21. The order to enter the ark is given in Genesis 7:1-4. Genesis 6:22 and 7:5 records the obedience of Noah to the divine instructions. While the flood was intended for the destruction of mankind, the ark was designed to save Noah and his family and to ensure the fulfillment of the divine purpose for the creation and the divine promise of salvation of Genesis 3:15. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:9). The word righteous (Hebrew: *saddiq*) means that Noah conformed to the divine standard, and met with God's approval. The second expression used of Noah is 'blameless' (verse 9). The Hebrew word is *tamim* that means 'complete'. Moses summarized the righteousness of Noah by writing, "Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). It was that righteousness which resulted from faith: "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith (Hebrews 11:7)". It was not Noah's works which preserved him from judgment, but grace. "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). Salvation has always been by grace, through faith; not of works, but unto good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). In contrast to Noah's righteousness was man's rottenness: "Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth" (Genesis 6:11,12).

2. The Preservation of Man and Animals (7:6-8:19)

The ark, now complete, having been constructed over many years according to the divine design, is entered at God's command (7:1) by both man and animals. Before the flood began, God shut the door. The source of water seems supernatural. It may well be that it had never rained before (cf. 2:6). Now the rain came in torrents. In addition the 'fountains of the deep' (7:11) were opened. Water, both from above and below, came forth for forty days (7:12). The waters prevailed on the earth for a total of 150 days (7:24), and then subsided over a period of months. Five months after the flood commenced the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat (8:4; 7:11). It took considerable time for the waters to recede and for the ground to be dry enough to walk on. It was a little more than a year that Noah and his family spent on the ark. At the command of the Lord they gladly disembarked.

3. The Promise (8:20-22)

Noah's first act upon setting foot on the earth was to offer sacrifices to God. It was a further evidence of his faith, and surely an expression of his gratitude for the salvation that God had provided. In response to the sacrifice of Noah, God made a solemn promise: "And the Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's

heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease (Genesis 8:21-22)". God's resolve is that He will never again curse the ground or destroy every living thing as He has just done. Why would God make such a commitment? Surely He was not sorry for what He had done. Sin had to be judged, did it not? The problem with the flood was that its effect was only temporary. The problem was not with creation, but with sin. God has therefore determined to deal differently with sin in the future, it will be dealt a fatal blow at the coming of Messiah. It is at this time that men will become new creatures (II Corinthians 5:17). After men are dealt with, a new heaven and a new earth will be provided as well (II Peter 3:13). God's promise of ultimate and final salvation is renewed in response to Noah's expression of faith through a sacrificial offering.

4. The Meaning of the Flood for Men of All Ages

First of all, the flood is a reminder to us of the matchless grace of God. While unbelievers found judgment, Noah found grace (Genesis 6:8). The difference between Noah and those who perished was their response to God's grace. Those who perished interpreted God's grace as divine indifference. They concluded that God neither cared nor troubled Himself at the occasion of men's sin. Noah, on the other hand, recognized grace for what it really is—an opportunity to enter into an intimate relationship with God, and at the same time, to avoid divine displeasure and judgment. Noah's years were spent in walking with God, building the ark, and proclaiming God's Word. Our Lord taught that the days preceding the flood would be just like those preceding His final appearance to judge the earth: For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be (Matthew 24:37-39). Men in the last days will be doing what they always have. There is nothing wrong with eating and drinking, giving in marriage, or buying and selling. What is wrong is doing so without God, and supposing that we may sin as we please without paying its penalty. The age of grace will end. Let us respond rightly to God's grace.

Second, we are instructed in the matter of the wrath of God. We learn from the flood that while God's wrath is slow, it is also certain. Judgment must eventually be meted out to those who reject God's grace. God does not delight in judgment, nor does He needlessly dwell upon it, but it is a certainty for those who resist His grace. There will be a time when the offer of salvation will be withdrawn.

Finally, let us consider the subject of the salvation of God. In the case of Noah we must observe that God's way of salvation was restrictive. God provided only one way of salvation (an ark) and only one door. Men could not be saved any way they wished, but only God's way. Such is the salvation which God offers men today: Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me' (John 14:6).

The Noahic Covenant—A New Beginning (Genesis 8:20-9:17)

1. The Divine Commitment (8:20-22)

Genesis 8:20-22 is not a promise, which God gave to Noah. Rather it is a purpose confirmed in the heart of God: "And the Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again

destroy every living things as I have done' (Genesis 8:21)". The eternal purpose of God to save men was made long before the days of Noah (Ephesians 1:4; 3:11; II Thessalonians 2:13; II Timothy 1:9, etc.). The reason for God's resolve is based upon the nature of man: "For the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21). Righteous Noah (6:9) will soon be found naked in a drunken stupor (9:21). No matter how many times the earth's slate is wiped clean by a flood, the problem will remain if but one man exists. The problem is within man—it is his sinful nature. His predisposition toward sin is not learned, it is innate—he is "evil from his youth." As a result, a full restoration must begin with a new man. This is what God historically purposed to accomplish. This purpose is partially expressed in verse 22: "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

2. A New Beginning (9:1-7)

Here (Genesis 9:1) and there (Genesis 1:28) God blessed His creatures and told them to be fruitful and multiply. Here (Genesis 9:3) and there (Genesis 1:29-30) God prescribed the food man could eat. There are differences, however, which indicate that the new beginning is to be different from the old. God pronounced the original creation 'good' (cf. 1:21, 31). The world of Noah's day received no such commendation, for the men who possessed it were sinful (8:21). Adam was charged to subdue the earth and to rule over the animal kingdom (1:28). Noah was given no such command. Instead, God placed in the animals a fear of man by which man could achieve a measure of control over them. While Adam and his contemporaries seem to have been vegetarians (Genesis 1:29-30; 9:3), Noah and his descendants could eat flesh (9:3-4). There was, however, one stipulation. They could not eat the blood of the animal, for the life of the animal was in its blood. This was to teach man not only that God values life, but that He owns it. God allows man to take the life of animals in order to survive, but they must not eat the blood. Most important of all, man is taught to reverence life. Men before the fall were obviously men of violence (Genesis 6:11) who, like Cain (Genesis 4:8), and Lamech (Genesis 4:23-24), had no regard for human life. This is more emphatically stated in verses 5 and 6 of chapter 9: "And surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." In addition to murder, suicide is prohibited by God's command in these verses. Life belongs to God—not only the life of animals and of others, but our own as well. We must realize that suicide is taking our life into our own hands when God says it belongs to Him. In the words of Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away" (Job 1:21). This passage seems to shed light on the controversial subject of abortion also. Man is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; 9:6). In view of this fact, murder is much more than an act of hostility against man—it is an affront to God. To attack man is to attack God in Whose image he was created.

3. The Noahic Covenant (9:8-17)

God's covenant with Noah and his descendants displays many of the characteristics of subsequent covenants which God had made with man. For this reason, we shall highlight some of the covenant's more obvious features.

(1) The Noahic Covenant was initiated and dictated by God. God initiated the covenant as an outward expression of His purpose revealed in Genesis 3:20-22. God dictated the terms of the covenant to Noah, and there was no discussion.

(2) The Noahic Covenant was made with Noah and all successive generations: “And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creation that is with you, for all successive generations;’” (Genesis 9:12).

(3) This is a universal covenant. While some covenants involve a small number, this particular covenant includes “all flesh.” That is, all living creatures, including man and animals: “Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth (Genesis 9:9,10)”.

(4) The Noahic Covenant is an unconditional covenant. Some covenants were contingent upon both parties carrying out certain stipulations. Such was the case of the Mosaic covenant. If Israel kept the law of God, they would experience the blessings and prosperity of God. If not, they would be expelled from the land (Deuteronomy 28). The blessings of the Noahic covenant were not conditional. God would give regularity of seasons and would not destroy the earth by a flood simply because He said so. While certain commands were given to mankind in verses 1-7, these are not viewed as conditions to the covenant.

(5) This covenant was God’s promise never again to destroy the earth by a flood: “and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Genesis 9:15). God will destroy the earth by fire (II Peter 3:10), but only after salvation has been purchased by the Messiah and the elect are removed, even as Noah was protected from the wrath of God.

(6) The sign of the Noahic Covenant is the rainbow: “I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh (Genesis 9:13-15). Every covenant has its accompanying sign. The sign of the Abrahamic Covenant is circumcision (Genesis 17:15-27); that of the Mosaic Covenant is the observance of the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-17). The “sign” of the rainbow is appropriate. It consists of the reflection of the rays of the sun in the particles of moisture in the clouds. The water, which destroyed the earth, causes the rainbow. Also, the rainbow appears at the end of a storm. So this sign assures man that the storm of God’s wrath (in a flood) is over.

The Nakedness of Noah and the Cursing of Canaan (Genesis 9:18-10:32)

1. The Cursing of Canaan (9:18-29)

After the flood, Noah began to farm the land by planting a vineyard. The result of his toil was the fruit of the vine, wine. While the first mention of wine is not without its negative connotations, we should not conclude that, due to its abuse here, the Bible consistently or without exception condemns its use (Deuteronomy 24:24-26; I Timothy 5:23). Many have been troubled at the deplorable condition of Noah, the man who before the fall was described as a “righteous man, blameless in his time” (6:9). Some have suggested that fermentation may not have occurred until after the flood, and that Noah was simply suffering the innocent results of his inventive efforts.

While we should not seek to excuse Noah, we must recognize that Moses did not emphasize the guilt of Noah, but rather the sin of Ham. It would seem that Ham and his two brothers were alerted to Noah's condition so that all three of them were standing outside the tent: "And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside" (Genesis 9:22). While Shem and Japheth refused to go inside, Ham had no reservations about entering the tent. Whatever the failing of Noah, he was inside his own tent, in privacy (9:21). That is the way Shem and Japheth wanted it. Ham entered in, violating the principle of privacy, yet not to assist his father but to be amused at his expense. Ham did nothing to preserve the dignity of his father. He did not see to it that Noah was properly covered. Instead he went outside to his two brothers and graphically described the folly, which had overtaken their father. Taking "the" garment, the one which Noah should have been wearing, upon their shoulders, Shem and Japheth went backward into the tent. Without looking upon their father, they covered him and left the tent.

In the morning, when Noah awoke from his drunkenness, he knew what had happened. We do not know how he learned of this. One thing I am certain about—Shem and Japheth did not tell Noah, or anyone else. I suspect that the story was well known around the camp the next morning, and probably due to Ham. If Ham did not hesitate to tell his brothers, why hesitate to tell all? Regardless of Noah's source of information, his response was one with broad implications. Canaan, the youngest son of Ham, was cursed. He was to be the lowest servant to his brothers, Shem and Japheth. Viewed in this way, it is impossible to see any application of this passage to the subjugation of the Black people of the earth. Ham was not cursed in this passage, but Canaan. Canaan was not the father of the Black peoples, but of the Canaanites who lived in Palestine and who threatened the Israelites.

In verse 26, it is not Shem who is blessed, but his God: "He also said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant'" (Genesis 9:26). By this, the godly line is to be preserved through Shem. From his seed the Messiah was said to come. The blessing comes not from Shem, but through Shem. The blessing flows out of the relationship, which he has with Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel. And the servitude of Canaan is one of the evidences of this blessing. Just as Shem's blessing consists in his relationship to Yahweh, Japheth will be blessed in his relationship to Shem."May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant (Genesis 9:27).

The problem, which must arise from the cursing of Canaan, is this: Why did God curse Canaan for the sin of Ham? Beyond this, why did God curse the Canaanites, a nation, for the sin of one man? The explanation, which best seems to answer these questions is that the words of Noah convey not only a cursing, and a blessing, but a prophecy. By prophetic revelation, Noah foresaw that the moral flaws evidenced by Ham would be most fully manifested in Canaan and in his offspring. Knowing this, the curse of God falls upon the Canaanites because of the sinfulness Noah foresaw. The emphasis thus falls upon the fact that the Canaanites would be cursed because of their sin, not due to Ham's. I think this explains why Canaan is cursed and not Ham, or the rest of his sons.

2. The Table of the Nations (10:1-32)

Japheth is dealt with first because he is least important to the theme being developed. Ham is next discussed because of the important part the Canaanites played in the history of Israel. Shem is mentioned last because he is the principle person of the chapter. He is the one through whom the "seed of the woman" will come. The godly line will be preserved through Shem. Only those nations are described who will play a key role in the national development of Israel in the land of Canaan. In general, the identity of the descendants of the three sons of Noah is known. From Japheth come the Indo-Europeans, the best known of which would

be the Greeks. Ham was the forefather of those who made up great cities and empires, including Babylon, Assyria, Ninevah, and Egypt. Put was probably the father of the Black peoples. From Canaan come those nations which made up those known generally as the Canaanites: “And Canaan became the father of Sidon, his first-born, and Heth and the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite and the Hivite and the Arkite and the Sinite and the Arvadite and the Zemarite and the Hamathite; and afterward the families of the Canaanite were spread abroad (Genesis 10:15-18; Deuteronomy 20:17)”. Their territory was that in close proximity to Israel: “And the territory of the Canaanite extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha (Genesis 10:19)”. Shem is the forefather of the Shemites. We must be careful not to confuse the designation with those peoples who speak Semitic languages. The Semitic languages include peoples of both Shem and Ham. The descendants of Shem include families stretching from Asia Minor to the northern mountains of the Tigris region, the Persian Gulf, and ultimately to North India. The most prominent of Shem’s descendants is Eber, the father of Peleg (10:25), the forefather of Abram (cf. 11:14-26).

The purpose of chapter 10 can be best summarized as follow: (a) to show that Divine Providence is reflected in the distribution of the nations over the face of the earth not less than in other acts of the world’s creation and administration; (b) to determine relationship between the people of Israel and the other peoples; (c) to teach the unity of post-diluvian humanity, which, like antediluvian mankind, was wholly descended from one pair of human beings.

The Unity of Unbelief (Genesis 11:1-9)

1. Conditions Prior to the Confusion of Tongues (11:1)

Mankind came from a common ancestor, namely Noah, so that all men spoke a common language: “... and the whole earth used the same language and the same words” (Genesis 11:1). Now there is nothing wrong with a common language. It is not evil, nor is it the cause of evil. Potentially, a common language could have drawn men and women together in the worship and work of God. Practically, it was perverted to promote disobedience and unbelief. God’s gift of language, like other gifts of His grace, was misused.

2. The Intentions of Man (11:2-4)

Man had migrated to the fertile plain in the land of Shinar and there settled down. “And it come about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shiner and settled there” (Genesis 11:2). Nimrod, a descendent of Ham, seemed to be an empire builder (10:9-12). In fact, it is possible that Nimrod was the leader in the movement to settle in Shinar and build this city with its tower. Settling in the valley of Shinar was an act of disobedience. God had commanded men to spread out and fill the land, not to congregate in cities: “And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth... And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it’ (Genesis 9:1,7)”.

In verses 3 and 4 the intentions of man are spelled out: “And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.’ And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. And they said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth’ (Genesis 11:3,4). Arrogance, rebellion, and pride seem to be the root of men’s activities here. The last statement of the people of ancient Babel is the key to our passage: “... lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth” (verse

4). These people could not conceive of blessing and security coming as a result of dispersion, even though God commanded it. They felt most secure when they were living in close proximity. While rebellion, pride, and unbelief are evident in the story, the underlying problem is one of fear.

The following verses record the response of God to man's disobedience: "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing, which they purpose to do, will be impossible for them. 'Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city (Genesis 11:5-8)." The completion of this city would in no way threaten the rule of God. Obviously, it would violate the command of God for man to disperse and fill the earth. In the days of the offspring of Noah at Babel, men placed their confidence in bricks and mortar and the work of their hands. In our time we are just a bit more sophisticated. We trust in transistors, integrated circuits, and technology. We feel that nothing can keep us from solving any problem. It is this attitude of arrogant self-confidence and independence of God, which God knew, was inevitable if man succeeded. Because of this, God purposed to thwart man's plans: "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language that they may not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7).

3. Conditions After the Confusion of Tongues (11:9)

"Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:9). At one time in history the name Babel (Ba.,b-ili) meant in Babylonian "the gate of God." By means of a play on words God changed its name to "confusion" (Balal). In this brief narrative we find some principles which are vital to true believers in any age: (1) Man's plans will never thwart God's purposes, (2) Unity is not the highest good, but purity and obedience to the Word of God, (3) The Word of God, and not the works of our hands, is the only thing worthy of our faith, and (4) Much of what man does on this earth is a monument to his insecurity.

The Call of Abram (Genesis 11:31-19:9)

1. The Command of God

The call of Abram is recorded for us in Genesis 12:1: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land, which I will show you.'" St. Stephen's words informed us that the call came to Abram was at Ur (Acts 7:2). Abram was told in detail what he must leave behind. He must leave his country, his relatives, and his father's house. God was going to make a new nation, Israel. While what was to be left behind was crystal clear, what lay ahead was distressingly devoid of detail: "... to the land which I will show you." Abram did not even know where he would settle. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, "... he went out, not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8). The faith to which we are called is not faith in a plan, but faith in a person. Much more important than **where** he was, God was concerned with **who** he was, and in **Whom** he trusted. God is not nearly so concerned with geography as He is with godliness. The command of God to Abram is, in effect, a reversal of what man attempted at Babel. Abram was secure and comfortable in Ur, a great city. God called him to leave that city and to exchange his townhouse for a tent. God promised Abram a great name (what the peo-

ple of Babel sought, 11:4) as a result of leaving Ur, leaving the security of his relatives, and trusting only in God. How unlike man's ways are from God's.

2. The Covenant with Abram (12:2-3)

Three major promises are contained in verses 2 and 3: a land; a seed; and a blessing. The land never belonged to Abram in his lifetime, even as God had said (15:13-16). When Sarah died, he had to buy a portion of the land for a burial site (23:3ff.), but it will be to his children. The second promise of the Abrahamic Covenant was that of a great nation coming from Abram. Abraham's blessing was largely to be seen in his descendants. Here was the basis for the 'great name' that God would give to Abram. This promise demanded faith on the part of Abram, for it was obvious that he was already aged, and that Sarai, his wife, was incapable of having children (11:30). It would be many years before Abram would fully grasp that this heir that God had promised would come from the union of he and Sarai. The final promise was that of blessing—blessing for him, and blessing through him. Much of Abram's blessing was to come in the form of his offspring, but there was also the blessing that would come in the form of the Messiah, who would bring salvation to God's people. To this hope our Lord, the Messiah, spoke, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). Beyond this, Abram was destined to become a blessing to men of every nation. Blessing would come through Abraham in several ways. Those who recognized the hand of God in Abram and his descendants would be blessed by contact with them. Pharaoh, for example, was blessed by exalting Joseph. Men of all nations would be blessed by the Scriptures which, to a great extent, came through the instrumentality of the Jewish people. Ultimately, the whole world was blessed by the coming of the Messiah, who came to save men of every nation, not just the Jews. Hereford, be sure that it is those who are of faith that are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer (Galatians 3:7-9)

3. The Compliance of Abram (11:31-32, 12:4-9)

Abram was a man like you and me. God providentially led Terah to pull up roots at Ur and to move toward Canaan (11:31). For some reason, Terah and his family stopped short of Canaan, and remained in Haran. Since Abram was unwilling or unable to leave his father's house, God took Abram's father in death (11:32). Now Abram obeyed God by faith and entered into the land of Canaan "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8)". Abraham was a man of great faith—after years of testing by God. A look at a map of the ancient world of patriarchal times would indicate that Abram traveled the well-trodden roads of his day (Shechem, Bethel, the Negev). This route was that commonly traveled by those who engaged in the commerce of those days. Jacob, after his return from Paddan-aram, came first to Shechem (33:18). Later he was instructed to go up to Bethel (35:1; verse 6). At both Shechem and Bethel he built altars, like Abram, his grandfather (33:20; 35:7). When Israel went into the land of Canaan, to possess it under Joshua, these same key cities were captured (Joshua 8:9, 30). Abram's journey unknowingly outlined the territory, which would belong to Israel, and that the places he stopped symbolically forecast the future conquest of the land. As such, it would have been an act flowing from faith.

4. Characteristics of the Life of Faith

(1) Abram's faith was commenced at the initiative of God.

(2) Abram's spiritual life continued through the sovereign work of God.

(3) The Christian's walk is a pilgrimage. Abraham lived as a pilgrim, looking for the city of God: "By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow-heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:9-10).

(4) The Christian walk is rooted in the reliability of the Word of God. The base of faith 'God said it, and that settles it, whether you believe it or not.' The Word of God is sufficient for man's faith. God has said that all men are sinners, deserving of, and destined to eternal punishment. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, the One Abram looked for in the future, to die on the cross to suffer the penalty for man's sin. He alone offers man the righteousness necessary for eternal life. God said it. You must believe it.

(5) The Christian walk is simply doing what God has told us to do and believing that He is leading us as we do so. God told Abram to leave without knowing where the path of obedience would lead, but believing that God was leading as he went. Faith is not developed by living life by some kind of map, but by using God's Word as a compass, pointing us in the right direction, but challenging us to walk by faith and not by sight.

(6) The Christian walk is a process of growth in grace. Christian faith should grow through time and through testing. Such was true in Abram's life.

When Faith Fails (Genesis 12:10-13:41)

1. Abram Faces a Famine (12:10-13)

True faith in God is a faith that grows. Faith grows as it is tested. For Abram, the first test was that of a famine: "Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land (Genesis 12:10)". It never seemed to occur to Abram that God was not only greater than the famine, but the giver of it, as a test of faith. Egypt seemed to be the logical solution. Nowhere is Abram directly condemned for his decision to go down to Egypt, but later developments make it clear that his actions did not stem from faith. Abram did not consult God, but acted independently. No altars were built in Egypt to our knowledge, nor are we told that Abram ever called on the name of the Lord there. His request of Sarai also reflects his spiritual condition. It would thus be safe to say that Abram's faith failed in the face of that famine.

It would seem that Abram made his decision to go to Egypt without considering the consequences. Just outside the border of Egypt Abram began to contemplate the dangers, which lay ahead. Sarai was a very beautiful woman, and there was good reason to fear the fate of a foreigner whose wife was so attractive. Abram thus appealed to his wife to accept his solution to this problem of his safety. He proposed that Sarai pose as his sister, so that he would not be killed. Such a plan was evil for several reasons. First of all, it tended to ignore the presence and power of God in Abram's life. Abram's plan was wrong because it jeopardized the purity of his wife and the promise of God. Abram was wrong as well because he looked to his wife to bring him blessing when God had promised to bring a blessing to others through Abram: "And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse" (Genesis 12:2-3). Finally, Abram's plan was wrong because his fears were hypothetical and his ethics were situational. Look carefully

at Abram's fears—they were all future. He had not yet entered the land (12:11), and what he feared was all stated in terms of the future (12:12-13).

2. Abram's Fears are Fulfilled (12:14-19)

It is true that Sarai was noted as a beautiful woman and this was reported to Pharaoh. But what was most crucial in what followed was the claim from both Abram and Sarai that she was his sister, and therefore eligible for marriage. While we can only conjecture as to Pharaoh's action, if the truth were known, he felt fully justified in taking the sister of Abram into his harem. God worked in Abram's life in a remarkable way. God taught Abram the painful lesson that the possibilities for the future are more numerous than we can predict. And so Abram is faced with a dilemma that he never considered. Without warning, God intervened in the life of Abram. Pharaoh and his household are struck by some kind of plague. We are given no details here of the plague, or of how its meaning was discerned. Abram was confronted by Pharaoh and roundly rebuked. Abram had no excuse or explanation. Here is a pagan correcting a prophet (20:7). It was a royal rebuke that Abram would painfully remember. How sad, however, that Abram could not speak, for this no doubt hindered any testimony to his faith in the living God Who had called him.

3. Abram's Restoration (12:20-13:4)

How different reality was from the faithless reasoning of Abram. While in Egypt, Sarai's purity was protected and Abram's life was preserved. More than this, all of his possessions were kept intact. And to top it off, Abram and those with him were escorted back to the land of Canaan. "And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him. So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him; and Lot with him. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold (Genesis 12:20-13:2)". The grace of God kept Abram in all his ways, in order to avoid a famine, Abram was forced to face a Pharaoh, the might of Egypt was not employed against him, but was commanded to assure his safe arrival in Canaan, and indeed, Abram left Egypt even richer than he had come. None of this was the result of Abram's faithless and dishonest actions but it was the product of divine grace and providential care. There are many principles in this passage, which should greatly strengthen the believer of any age: (1) When God promises the 'ends,' He also provides the means. (2) Our faith fails because our God is too small. (3) When our faith fails ... God doesn't.

Lot Looks Out For Number One (Genesis 13:5-18)

As they came out of Ur with Terah, Abram and Lot seemed inseparable, even when God had commanded Abram to leave his relatives behind (Genesis 12:1). But finally, the ties between the two were weakening. Essentially their separation was caused by three factors which are recorded in verses 5-7: "Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents and the land could not sustain them while dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land (Genesis 13:5-7). The first problem was the success of both men as keepers of flocks. Both Abram (13:2) and Lot (13:5) had prospered. Now their flocks and herds had become so large that they could no longer dwell together (13:6). The second problem was the strife, which seemed to be steadily growing between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot (13:7). The third is the fact that the land where they sojourned was shared with others; namely the Canaanites and the Perizzites (13:7).

“Then Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right, or if to the right, then I will go to the left’ (Genesis 13:8-9)”. More than anything, Abram wanted to maintain peace and heal the strife, which had come between himself and Lot. The overriding principle is that of the unity of brotherhood that must be preserved. The offer gave Lot the advantage, and left Abram vulnerable. Lot’s decision was made on the basis of cool calculation. With the eye of an appraiser, he looked over the land, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the options: “And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere—this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other (Genesis 13:10-11)”. He fixed his gaze on the beautiful Jordan valley. Its beautiful green evidenced the presence of the plentiful waters of the Jordan for irrigation. One did not have to live by faith in such a place for water was abundant, and one did not have to look to God for rain. It was, in my mind, a selfish decision—one that took all of the best and left Abram with that which seemed worthless.

Abram and Lot have now separated. Abram dwelt in Canaan, while Lot edged more and more closely to Sodom: “Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom (Genesis 13:12)”. Lot had considered very carefully the economic factors of his decision, but he totally neglected the spiritual dimensions. Furthermore, Lot had not considered the consequences of living in the cities of the valley. While the soil was fertile and water was plentiful, the men in those cities were wicked. The spiritual cost of Lot’s decision was great. And, in the final analysis, the material benefits all become losses, too. The decision may not seem very important, but its final outcome can be terrifying and tragic.

Now the promise of God is restated: ‘... Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land, which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you’ (Genesis 13:14b-17). Yet God assured Abram that all the land he beheld was to be given him. Lot may have chosen to live in Sodom, but God had not given it to him for a possession, nor would He.

Abram’s response revealed a growing faith in the God Who called him. He moved his tents toward Hebron, settling near the oaks of Mamre. It was a plot of ground, which belonged to another, not Abram (14:3), but it was where God wanted him to be. There Abram built an altar and worshipped his God. How different were the paths of these two men after they separated. The one was almost imperceptibly edging closer and closer to the city of Sodom, to live among godless and wicked men, and all for the sake of financial gain. The other was living the life of the sojourner, dwelling on those barren hills, with his hope in the promises of God. One lives in his tent and builds an altar of worship; the other trades in his tent for an apartment in the city of wicked men. Here was a decision, which bore heavily on the destiny of two men, but far more, on the destiny of their offspring.

The Rescue of Lot (Genesis 14:1-24)

1. The Sacking of Sodom and the Loss of Lot (14:1-16)

Four kings, Amraphel of Babylonia, Arioch of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam (modern Iran), and Tidal of Goiim in one alliance fought another alliance of Bera of Sodom, Birsha of Gomorrah, Shinab of Admah, Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the King of Bela. Sodom and Gomorrah were sacked. Everything and everyone that could be carried off was. “And they also took Lot, Abram’s nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom” (Genesis 14:12). Lot had chosen to act on the basis of economic self-interest, and had thus disregarded the covenant God had made with Abram (12:1-3). What Lot should have learned is that “he who lives by the sword, also dies by it.” Economic self-interest was the motive of the kings of both alliances.

One of those who escaped from Chedorlaomer found Abram and reported Lot’s fate to him: “Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram (Genesis 14:13)”. And when Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan (Genesis 14:14). For whatever reasons, Abram went after his nephew. Because of His promise to Abram (12:1-3), God protected and prospered him. And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people (Genesis 14:15-16). Everything was recovered: the possessions, the people, and the prodigal—Lot.

2. The King of Sodom and the King of Salem (14:17-24)

Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley) (Genesis 14:17). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ And he gave him a tenth of all (Genesis 14:18-20). Melchizedek is a crucial figure in this account because he put Abram’s victory in proper theological perspective. Melchizedek was a king and a priest, not a king and a politician. He blessed Abram and the God. His words were intended to remind Abram that the victory was God’s, and that his success was a result of God’s blessing. “... And he gave him a tenth of all.” This is the first instance of tithing, and that it occurred before the Law was given. Therefore, the practice of tithing goes beyond the Law and thus is binding on Christians today. The writer to the Hebrews informs us of the content of Abram’s tithe: Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest *spoils* (Hebrews 7:4).

And the king of Sodom said to Abram, ‘Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself’ (Genesis 14:21). Abram’s words must have been an even greater shock to the king of Sodom than his act of sharing the spoils with Melchizedek: And Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, “I have made Abram rich”’ (Genesis 14:22-23)

Several lessons we can learn, first, when we feel as though no one else is keeping the faith, such impressions are self-deception (I Kings 19:14,18), there many keep the faith we don’t know, here was a godly king/priest, Melchizedek, whom we have not seen before, nor after, but he is a true believer. God works

through men. Second the matter of giving and receiving, the most important issue is the glory of God. If we give to receive glory, our gifts are of no benefit (Matthew 6:2-4). If we prosper at the hand of those who reject God and who take the glory themselves, God's glory is veiled to men. Let us be most cautious in this matter of money and material things. Some may take money, even from the devil, but Abram would not. Finally, this event provides us with a beautiful illustration of the salvation of God.

The Focal Point of Abram's Faith (Genesis 15:1- 16:16)

1. Abram's Hope for an Heir (15:1-6)

God's words to Abram are "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great" (Genesis 15:1). Why would Abram possibly be afraid? Abram's response to God showed the cause of fear: "And Abram said, 'O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir'" (Genesis 15:2-3). God had promised Abram his descendants were to come from his own reproductive cells. He would have a son of his own. Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir" (Genesis 15:4). To reassure Abram, God took him outside and drew his attention to the stars in the heavens. This is how numerous the offspring of Abram would be through his son that would surely come (verse 5). Verse 6 describes Abram's response to divine revelation: "Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Notice three things about this faith of Abram: (1) First of all, it was a personal faith. By this I mean that Abram believed in the Lord. He did not merely believe about God, but in Him. (2) Second, Abram's faith was a propositional faith. While Abram believed in the person of God, his faith was based upon the promises of God. (3) Abram's faith was also a practical faith. By this I mean that Abram's belief was one that necessitated action. Clearly, Abram's works did not initiate his salvation, but they did demonstrate it (James 2:14). Also, Abram's faith was related to a very practical and sensed need—the need for a son. God does not ask us to believe in the abstract, but in the everyday matters of life.

2. Reassurance Concerning the Land Abram Would Possess (15:7-21)

Having dealt with Abram's greatest need for reassurance—namely that of an heir, God went on to strengthen Abram's faith concerning the land he would possess: "And He said to him, 'I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it'" (Genesis 15:7). Abram's question does not seem to reflect disbelief, but wonder at how this will be accomplished: "And he said, 'O Lord God, how may I know that I shall possess it?'" (Genesis 15:8). God did not rebuke Abram for his question, but confirmed His promise by a covenant. So He said to him, 'Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away (Genesis 15:9-11). In the ancient world of Abram, legal and binding agreements were not put on papers written by lawyers and signed by the parties involved. Instead, the two parties would arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement, and then they would formalize it in the form of a covenant. The covenant was sealed by the dividing of an animal (or animals). In fact, the technical term literally means 'go cut a covenant.' The animal(s) was cut in half and the two parties would pass between the halves. It seems that in this oath, the men acknowledged that the fate of the animal should be theirs if they broke the terms of their agreement.

“Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him” (Genesis 15:12). And God said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions’ (Genesis 15:13-14). There seems to be two reasons for the 400-year delay before the land of Canaan would be possessed. First, the children of Abraham would not yet be able (or numerous enough) to possess the land earlier. Also the people of the land were not yet wicked enough to thrust out: “Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16). Here is an important principle, and one that governs the possession of the land of Canaan. God owns the land of Canaan (Leviticus 25:23), and He lets it out to those who will live according to righteousness. When Israel forgot their God and practiced the abominations of the Canaanites (II Chronicles 28:3, 33:2), God put them out of the land also. Over the next 400 or more years from the time of this revelation, two programs were simultaneously at work. The Canaanites were growing more and more wicked, and their day of reckoning was steadily approaching. At the same time, the nation of Israel was about to be born, growing rapidly in number, and in spiritual maturity, preparing for the day of possession.

And it came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite’ (Genesis 15:17-21). This covenant is distinctive because only God, in the appearance of a smoking oven and a flaming torch, passed between the divided carcasses of animals. This was done to signify that the covenant was unilateral and unconditional. No conditions were placed upon Abram for its fulfillment. The geographical boundaries have been clearly defined, and even the peoples who were to be dispossessed were named. God committed Himself to a very specific course of action.

3. Sarai’s Proposal (16:1-6)

The first six verses are not merely a condemnation of Sarai’s attitudes and actions. In reality we find a concert of sins with Abram, Sarai, and Hagar all contributing to the discord which results. Sarai, Abram’s wife, was prevented from having children. Sarai felt personally responsible for the absence of Abram’s hire. She assumed that since she had not given birth to a child, and her age seemed to prohibit it, something else must be done to enable Abram to have a child through another woman. She must have been thinking in this fashion: “Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children” (Genesis 16:2). Abram could thus father a child, although Sarai would not be the mother. The culture of that day provided the means to accomplish Sarai’s intentions. Ancient documents reveal that when a woman could not provide her husband with a child, she could give her female slave as a wife and claim the child of this union as her own. The consequences of Sarai’s plan inform us that such a proposal was wrong. Sarai seems to have considered it her responsibility to produce a son for Abram. No basis for this assumption can be seen in Scripture (Genesis 12:1-3). Here is the sin of presumption. Failing to trust God to provide a son, she forced the situation by pressuring Abram into taking Hagar as his wife. Sarai did not act in faith, but in presumption.

Abram was at fault, also. Indeed, in some ways this sin can be traced back to Abram’s unbelief, when he left Canaan and went down to Egypt (Genesis 12:10-13:4). Is it mere coincidence that Hagar was Egyptian? Now Sarai, Abram’s wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name

was Hagar (Genesis 16:1). The probability is great that Hagar was a gift from Pharaoh to Abram, a part of the dowry for Sarai: “Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake; and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels” (Genesis 12:16). Seemingly with little or no protest, he passively followed the instructions of his wife. She wanted an heir. She planned the marriage. Abram did as he was told ‘Abram listened to his wife.’ Hagar was not without her own share of guilt. She was not wrong in going to bed with Abram, so far as I can tell. She was a slave, subject to the will of her mistress. She had little or no voice in this decision. But she was wrong in the false sense of pride and smugness she felt toward Sarai. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight (Genesis 16:4). Hagar forgot that God had closed Sarai’s womb. She disregarded the fact that ‘children are a gift of the Lord’ (Psalm 127:3). She gloried in that which was no cause for pride. And so we have seen a sequence of sins, beginning in Egypt, and ending in the bedroom of an Egyptian slave. Each of the three: Sarai, Abram, and Hagar, has been caught in the web of sin. Sarai acted in presumption; Abram lapsed into passivity; Hagar was the victim of pride. In yet another round of sin, each responds wrongly to the dilemma into which their sin has brought them.

Sarai found that her scheme had backfired. A child was born, but while loved by Abram (17:18,20; 21:11), Sarai despised him (21:10). Ishmael had driven a wedge between Abram and Sarai, rather than drawing them together. Even the once loyal Hagar now despised her mistress. Abram had given Sarai what she had wanted, but now she insisted that he had failed her in doing so: “And Sarai said to Abram, ‘May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms; but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the Lord judge between you and me’” (Genesis 16:5). While Sarai was angry with Abram, she must have known that it was she who had made Hagar’s bed. No confession or repentance of sin is found as yet on Sarai’s lips, but only bitter remorse. Abram did not change his course either. He should have learned that his passivity was not piety. He did not acknowledge his sin, nor did he confront Sarai with hers. Instead he persisted in allowing Sarai to have her own way. But Abram said to Sarai, ‘Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight.’ So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence (Genesis 16:6).

4. A Divine Intervention (16:7-16)

The reason for this divine intervention is to be found in verses 7-16. “Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from and where are you going?” (Genesis 16:7). Running away does not change relationships, nor does it remove responsibility. Jonah, even in the belly of that fish, was still God’s prophet with a message for the Ninevites. Hagar continued to be Sarai’s maid, and it remained her duty to serve her mistress. Where would Hagar go? Back to Egypt? After ten years, and pregnant? Was this a reasonable thing to do? God commanded her to return to the one in authority over her: “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority” (Genesis 16:9). Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, ‘I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they shall be too many to count.’ The angel said to her further, ‘Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has given heed to your affliction. And he will be a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone, and everyone’s hand will be against him; and he will live to the east of all his brothers’ (Genesis 16:10-12). Ishmael’s descendants, too, will be too numerous to count (16:10; 13:16; 15:5). From him will come princes and rulers (17:20). That which might seem a curse was perhaps Hagar’s greatest comfort. Ishmael would live a free lifestyle, unrestricted, unfettered, and a thorn in the flesh of his brothers (16:12). To Hagar, the afflicted slave of Sarai, this was a source of hope and comfort. Even under the cruel hand of her mistress, one can almost hear Hagar mumbling under her breath, “Just wait, Sarai.” The predominant theme of verses 7-16 is stated

by Hagar in verse 13, “Thou art a God who sees.” Ishmael means literally, ‘God hears.’ Even when it is the chosen of God who are the source of affliction, God hears and cares for the down-trodden. This truth did much to carry Hagar through the difficult years that lay ahead.

Grasping the Great Truth of God (Genesis 17:1-27)

1. God’s Promise (17:1-8)

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly’ (Genesis 17:1-2). Here, God revealed Himself; He appeared to Abram. Abram had seen God for the first time. God referred to Himself as ‘God Almighty,’ *El Shaddai*. This is the first time God has been called by this name. It is a designation which emphasizes His infinite power. Just as Abram had heard God refer to Himself by a new name, so Abram is renamed, a token of his destiny: As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations (Genesis 17:4-5). The name Abram meant ‘high father’ or ‘exalted father.’ But now his name was changed to ‘father of a multitude.’”

2. Stipulations of the Covenant (17:9-14)

The obligation upon Abraham and his descendants was that they be circumcised: This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised (Genesis 17:10). Circumcision is the only act of surgery of its kind that is beneficial to mankind. More than its physical benefits, it signifies spiritual requirements as well. Symbolically, the flesh is put away. The similarities between baptism and circumcision have emphasized (Colossians 2:10-12). Both signify a union with God. Both necessitate the putting away of former things and living a life pleasing to God (Romans 6:1ff; Colossians 3:1-11).

3. A Promise for Sarah (17:15-19)

As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her (Genesis 17:15-16). Abraham’s response is puzzling: Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ (Genesis 17:17). Abraham’s words to God also reflect a failure to fully grasp what has just been promised: “Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!” (Genesis 17:18). God’s plans would not be changed. God had purposed to give Abraham and Sarah a child and through this child to bring about His promises. No substitute son was satisfactory, especially when he was the result of self-effort. Indeed, Sarah would bear a son and the spiritual blessings could only come about through him: ‘No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him’ (Genesis 17:19).

4. A Promise for Ishmael (17:20-21)

While the spiritual blessings must come through Isaac, God will not overlook the love of Abraham for his son nor of His own promise to Hagar (16:10ff.). Ishmael would become a great nation, and of him

would come 12 princes, but the spiritual blessings could only come through Isaac. The doctrine of divine election is to be seen in this promise.

5. Abraham's Obedience (17:22-27)

Verses 22-27 stress the important role of obedience in our Christian lives. It is precious to God. Because of this, He recorded the circumcision of Abraham, Ishmael, and all of Abraham's household. The response of faith to divine commands is always obedience. While there was a time lapse of 13 years from the birth of Ishmael to this appearance of God, there was only about three months from the circumcision of Abraham to the birth of Isaac.

Marks of Maturity (Genesis 18:1-33)

1. The Heavenly Trio and Abraham's Hospitality (18:1-8)

While this is not the first appearance of our Lord to Abraham, it is certainly unique. Previously, God had spoken directly (12:1-3; 13:14-17), through a spokesman (14:19-20), by a vision (15:1ff), and in an appearance, one which may have been accompanied with glory and splendor (17:1). Now, God comes to Abraham appearing as an ordinary man, accompanied by two others who eventually are identified as angelic beings (compare 18:2,22; 19:1). Now the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. And when he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; ... (Genesis 18:1-2). Abraham, in typical eastern fashion, sat by the door of his tent in the heat of the day. The time of day made the need for hospitality even greater, for these guests would be thirsty and weary from the heat. Abraham's hospitality would be put to the test. While such hospitality is still a part of the culture of the east, Abraham's zeal for his task is obvious: ... and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, 'My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by. Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant.' And they said, 'So do, as you have said.' So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it, and make bread cakes.' Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf, and gave it to the servant; and he hurried to prepare it. And he took curds and milk and the calf, which he had prepared, and placed it before them; and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate (Genesis 18:2-8). Abraham's duty was performed in no perfunctory or haphazard way. He minimized the provisions and the trouble it would take to prepare them—a little water, a piece of bread, a short rest, and a moment to wash their feet. But what was provided was a sumptuous meal. A large quantity of bread was freshly baked, a choice calf was butchered and prepared, curds and milk were served. No simple meal was this! And Abraham refused to sit with his guests, but stood by to serve them. No doubt the writer to the Hebrews spoke of this when he wrote: Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2).

2. God's Promise Confirmed, Yet Questioned (18:9-15)

Then they said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?' And he said, 'Behold, in the tent.' And he said, 'I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have become old, shall I have

pleasure, my lord being old also?' And the Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh saying, "Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?" Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.' Sarah denied it however, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. And He said, 'No, but you did laugh' (Genesis 18:9-15). When asked where Sarah was, Abraham replied that she was inside the tent. The Lord then assured Abraham that Sarah would have a son next year. The substance of this promise differed little from that revealed previously as recorded in chapter 17 (verses 19,21). For Abraham, this must have clinched the identity of his guests. Sarah's response differed very little from her husband's (Genesis 17:17), And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?' (Genesis 18:12). Notice that a gentle rebuke is directed, at first, toward Abraham, not Sarah. "And the Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh ...'" (Genesis 18:13). The words of our Lord speak as loudly to Christians today as they did to Abraham, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14a). In addition to reassuring Abraham and (perhaps) informing Sarah of the promised child's birth, the words of the Lord in verses 10 and 14 served to confirm the identity of the third guest as the Lord Himself. In chapter 17 the Lord had promised Abraham a child through Sarah in the first person (17:15-16,19,21). In chapter 18 the promise is again stated in the first person (verses 10, 14). In addition, this "visitor" was able to know the inner thoughts of Sarah as she laughed to herself in the tent (verse 13). No question now remained concerning the identity of the One and His two fellow travelers.

3. God's Purpose Confided in Abraham (18:16-21)

The high point of Abraham's spiritual life is seen in his intercession with the Lord for the sparing of the righteous in Sodom. The Lord and the two angels made their way down toward . may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him" (Genesis 18:17-19)". And the Lord said, 'The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know' (Genesis 18:20-21). The sin of the city is so great that it virtually cries out to heaven for retribution (verse 20). God's personal interest and focused attention is depicted as 'going down'^{iv} to deal with it. The text does not mean to undermine the omniscience of God, for God does know all. God is not 'going down' to learn the facts, but to take personal interest in them and to rectify the matter. So it is that Abraham discerned that God was about to destroy the city, although it was not stated specifically.

4. Abraham Intercedes with God for Sodom (18:22-33)

The two angels went on toward Sodom, leaving our Lord and Abraham alone, overlooking the city (19:27,28). And Abraham came near and said, 'Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from Thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from Thee! Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?' (Genesis 18:23-25). His appeal is based upon the justice of God. Justice would not allow the righteous to suffer the punishment due the wicked (verse 25). So that they might come to faith in God in time. God agreed to spare the city if 50 righteous could be found (verse 26). Abraham must have doubted that such a number could be found, and so he began to plead for a lower figure. And Abraham answered and said, 'Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, wilt Thou destroy the whole city because of five?' And He said, 'I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there' (Genesis 18:27-28). From here, Abraham

was encouraged to attempt to further reduce the minimum number of righteous required to spare Sodom. First it was 40, then 30, then 20, and finally 10. Personally, I believe the heart of God was warmed by Abraham's compassion, zeal, and intercession for others. In the final analysis there were only three righteous in Sodom, Lot and his two daughters. Some might well question the righteousness of the daughters from their actions in the next chapter. Regardless, God did remember Abraham's petition. While He did not spare the city of Sodom, He did spare the righteous. He is able and willing to do far beyond what we ask or think, as the Scriptures elsewhere teach (Ephesians 3:20).

From City Councilman to Caveman “What a Difference a Day Makes” (Genesis 19:1-38)

1. Hospitality Versus Homosexuality (19:1-11)

“Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. And he said, ‘Now behold, my lords, please turn aside into your servant’s house, and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way.’ They said however, ‘No, but we shall spend the night in the square.’ Yet he urged them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he prepared a feast for them, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate” (Genesis 19:1-3).

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening. Lot, who was sitting at the city gate, identified them as mortal men and as strangers, but not as messengers of destruction. Since the elders of the city sat as judges at the gates of the city (Job 29:7-12), it is not unlikely that Lot, over a period of time, had gained prominence and power. Lot's popularity and power may well have been derived from his relationship to Abraham. Lot's hospitality offered for the two strangers is the evidence of his righteousness as indicated by St. Peter in his epistle. It would seem that Lot's persistence is motivated as much by fear for the safety of the strangers as by his generosity. In a short time the entire city had gathered about Lot's house seeking sex with the strangers. This was not the ‘broad-minded’ tolerance of a city whose laws permitted such conduct between consenting adults in private. It was not even the shameless solicitation to sin. Rather, it was rape, and that of the worst form. Imagine it, a whole city, young and old. Surely judgment was due.

Lot's response is typical of his spiritual state. The crowd demanded that Lot turn over his guests, an unthinkable violation of the protection guaranteed one who comes under the roof of your house. Lot stepped outside, closing the door behind him, hoping to defuse the situation. He pleaded with them not to act wickedly, and, just as we are about to applaud his courage, he offers to surrender his two daughters to the appetites of these depraved degenerates. However, the crowd refused Lot's offer, Lot, who supposed it was his duty to save the strangers, is rescued by them. By the words they spoke, their identity and their task were revealed to Lot. Their sight either removed completely or dazzled and distorted, the men of the city groped for the door, but wore themselves out trying to find it (II Kings 6:18).

2. Lot's Last Stand (19:12-22)

Then the men said to Lot, ‘Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the Lord that the Lord has sent us to destroy it’ (Genesis 19:12,13). His sons-in-law took it all for some kind of joke: And Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, ‘Up, get out of this place, for the Lord will destroy

the city.’ But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting (Genesis 19:14). The angels ordered Lot to take his wife and his two daughters and get out of the city before judgment fell. And when morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Up, take your wife and your two daughters, who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.’ But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hands of his daughters, for the compassion of the Lord was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city (Genesis 19:15-16).

When given specific instruction to flee to the mountains as far from Sodom as possible (verse 17), Lot again resisted and plead for a less painful program: But Lot said to them, ‘Oh no, my lords! Now behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have magnified your lovingkindness, which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest the disaster overtake me and I die; now behold, this town is near enough to flee to, and it is small. Please, let me escape there (is it not small?) that my life may be saved’ (Genesis 19:18-20). What a difference between the intercession of Abraham and the prayer (or plea) of Lot. Abraham prayed for the preservation of the cities for the sake of the righteous, particularly Lot and his family. Abraham had no selfish interest at stake. To the contrary, removing the peoples of the cities might have appeared to have left the land open for Abraham to possess. Lot plead for the city of Zoar (previously Bela, Genesis 14:2), not for the sake of those who lived there, but for his own convenience. If judgment must fall, could God not make it easy on Lot? After all, wasn’t it just a little city? And so the city was spared (verse 21).

3. Fire and Brimstone (19:23-26)

Sunrise came just as Lot, with his wife and daughters, approached Zoar (verse 23). Safely out of reach of the devastation, the Lord rained down fire and brimstone from heaven upon the cities of the valley. Many suggestions have been made as to the mechanics employed to bring about this destruction. While I believe that natural elements such as lightening, earthquakes, or volcanic eruptions, probably were involved, this makes it no less a miracle. This was judgment from the Lord (19:13- 4; 24-25), and He was in full control of its extent and timing (verses 22,24-25). The devastation included the four towns and even the soil on which they were built. It was a picture of complete devastation.

The death of Lot’s wife is tragic indeed. She died, it seems, within steps of safety. They had virtually arrived at the city of Zoar. While Lot hastened on, she looked back to the city, it is the love of the world. Her heart, like Lot’s, was in Sodom. She lingered behind, then looked back for only a moment, but it was too late. The destruction meant for Sodom struck her as well, and only steps from safety and those she loved. Regardless of her motive, she directly disobeyed a clear command of the angelic messenger (19:17).

The remaining verses depict the final state of Lot. In a drunken stupor he became the father of two nations, both of which were to be a plague to Israel. Lot, and those who came from him, were a pain to Abraham and his descendants. His daughters began to conclude that their father was not trying to protect himself so much as them. He would lose no more daughters to wicked men. And so it seemed that Lot would perish without a seed unless the girls did something about it themselves. They concluded, “... there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of the earth” (Genesis 19:31).. They saw no normal means for them to marry and bear children, their perception was undoubtedly wrong. While Lot was in a drunken stupor the first daughter, and then the second, went in to him and became pregnant. At best, Lot was only partially aware of what had taken place until it was too late. Two nations were born of this incestuous relationship, Moab and Ammon. While God dealt kindly with these nations because of their relationship to Abraham (Deuteronomy 2:19), they were a continual hindrance to the godly conduct of the Israelites.

Eventually, they would suffer the judgment of God as did Sodom and Gomorrah: Therefore, as I live,' declares the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Surely Moab will be like Sodom, and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah—a place possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a perpetual desolation. The remnant of My people will plunder them, and the remainder of My nation will inherit them' (Zephaniah 2:9).

Don't Ever Say Never (Genesis 20:1-18)

1. Abimelech Is Restrained (20:1-7)

For an unspecified reason Abraham left Mamre, wandering southward near Kadesh and then northwest to Gerar, not far from the Mediterranean Sea in the land of the Philistines. At Gerar, Abraham repeated a sin committed very early in his life as a follower of God (12:10). Once again, he passed off his wife Sarah as his sister, which resulted in her being taken into the harem of Abimelech, king of Gerar. The same story happened before between Abraham and Pharaoh in Genesis 12. The differences between chapters 12 and 20 are significant. Some of these are:

Chapter 12	Chapter 20
Place: Egypt	Place: Gerar
Time: Early in faith's Life	Time: Late in faith's Life
King: Pharaoh	King: Abimelech
Abraham's response to rebuke: Silence	Abraham's response to rebuke: Excuses
Result: Abraham left Egypt	Result: Abraham stayed in Gerar

The situation here is far more critical than in chapter 12. First, God has clearly revealed to Abraham and Sarah that together they will bear a son through whom the covenant promises will be realized. More than this, the conception of the child must be near at hand, for he was said to have been born within the space of a year (17:21; 18:10). Abimelech was restrained by God in a two-fold fashion. First, God warned him in the strongest terms: "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married" (Genesis 20:3). Secondly, Abimelech and all of his household were physically restrained from sinning against Sarah, even if they had wished to: "Then God said to him in the dream, 'Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet and he will pray for you, and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.... And Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children. For the Lord had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife (Genesis 20:6-7, 17-18)".

By means of some undisclosed physical malady, no one in the royal household was able to conceive. Further, it seems that sexual activity was prohibited altogether. This would ensure Sarah's purity, as well as prevent the birth of a child by Abimelech. The revelation Abimelech received in the dream thus explained the reason for the plague, which had fallen upon his household. While the imminent danger for Abimelech and his household is emphasized, so also is his innocence: Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, 'Lord, wilt Thou slay a nation, even though blameless? Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And

she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this' (Genesis 20:4-5). Abimelech, unlike Abraham, was guiltless in this matter. His actions were based upon purity of motive and upon the untrue statements of Abraham and Sarah. God acknowledged the innocence of the king but made it clear that apart from divine intervention he would have committed a grave offense. The way Abimelech handled this matter now would determine his destiny. To delay or disobey meant certain death.

2. Abraham Is Rebuked (20:8-18)

Abimelech wasted no time making matters right before God. He arose early in the morning and reported the substance of his dream to those of his household. Because they were affected along with Abimelech, they greatly feared (verse 8). After informing his servants, Abimelech summoned Abraham. "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done (Genesis 20:9)". Abimelech did not ask Abraham to leave, perhaps out of fear of what God might do for such lack of hospitality. Abraham's excuses, weak as they are, are reported to us: "And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place; and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife; and it came about, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother"'" (Genesis 20:11-13)". Three reasons are stated for Abraham's deception, but none of them satisfactorily explain his actions in Gerar. First, Abraham acted out of fear. He feared that because of Sarah's beauty he would be killed, and she would be taken as a wife by violence. Secondly, his statement, though a lie, was technically factual. Sarah was, indeed, his sister, the daughter of his father, but not his mother (verse 12). Facts can be and often are used in such a way as to convey falsehood. The third reason I have labeled "tradition." When all else fails to justify the way we have acted, we can always fall back on these well-worn words: "But we've always done it that way before." That's what Abraham was saying in substance. His actions before Abimelech were not to be taken personally—they were merely company policy. This policy had been established many years ago. Having looked at each of the three lines of Abraham's defense, there is absolutely no indication of acceptance of responsibility for sin, nor of sorrow or repentance. I do not think that Abimelech was impressed with Abraham's explanation. Nevertheless, God had severely cautioned him, and he knew that Abraham was the only one who could intercede for him to remove the plague, which prohibited the bearing of children. Because of this, restitution was made. First, Sarah was given back to her husband Abraham along with sheep, oxen, and servants (verse 14). Then, to Abraham the invitation was extended for him to settle in the land wherever he chose (verse 15). Finally, a thousand pieces of silver were given to Abraham as a symbol of Sarah's vindication (verse 16). Her return to Abraham, therefore, was not because she was found to be unacceptable or undesirable.

When Abraham prayed, the wombs of Abimelech's household were opened so that they once again bore children. So Sarah's womb was to be opened as well. The promised son was soon to be born.

(Genesis 21:1-34)

1. The Birth of the Promised Son (21:1-7)

The events of verses 1 through 7 can be seen in three different dimensions. In verses 1 and 2 we see the divine dimension in the birth of the son as a gift from God. Verses 3 through 5 record the response of Abraham to the birth of this son. Finally, in verses 6 and 7 we have the jubilation of Sarah over the arrival of the long-awaited child, who is the joy of her life.

And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him (Genesis 21:3-5). And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." And she said, "who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age" (Genesis 21:6-7). The name Isaac meant "laughter." Both Abraham and Sarah, when they were told of the son who was to be born to them, laughed (17:17; 18:12). More than anything, their laughter was prompted by the absurdity of the thought of having a child so late in life. But now the name Isaac took on a new significance, for he was a delight to his mother, who experienced the pleasures of motherhood so late in her life.

2. Ishmael Is Put Away (21:8-21)

On the day Isaac was weaned, Abraham prepared a great feast. The sight of Hagar's son at the feast robbed Sarah of all of the joy she should have had. St Paul's commentary in Galatians 4:29 informs us that mockery was done by Ishmael against Isaac. As the result of this, Sara said to Abraham: Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of the maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac (Genesis 21:10). Abraham was deeply grieved by the decision that was being forced upon him (Genesis 21:11). From chapter 17 we know that he was very attached to his son Ishmael. God reassured Abraham that as painful and unpleasant as the situation might be, putting Ishmael away was the right thing to do. In this instance he should listen to his wife: Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named (Genesis 21:12). Abraham arose early to send off Hagar and Ishmael. Hagar lost her way in the desert and that this explains why she "wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba" (verse 14). Eventually the provisions Abraham gave them ran out and death appeared to be at hand (17:25). As a descendant of Abraham, Ishmael was the object of God's special care. His cries brought divine intervention: "And God heard the lad crying; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What is the matter with you, Hagar? Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand; for I will make a great nation of him" (Genesis 21:17-18)".

3. Abimelech Makes a Treaty with Abraham (21:22-34)

Verses 22 through 34 describe a particular incident in the life of Abraham. The agreement which was made between Abraham and Abimelech. Abraham was recognized as a man of influence and power. Abimelech and Phicol came to Abraham; they did not invite him to the palace. They came to make a treaty: "Now it come about at that time, that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do; now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, or with my offspring, or with my posterity; but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me, and to the land in which you have sojourned" (Genesis 21:22-23)". They acknowledged that their motivation was based largely upon the fact that Abraham was one loved by God. To fight Abraham was to attack Abraham's God and to have to contend with Him. On the other hand,

to have an alliance with Abraham was to have God on his side. No wonder Abimelech was so anxious to negotiate such a treaty.

Once the treaty was made, Abraham brought up a specific grievance, which could be settled under the terms just reached. Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well that his servants had dug, only to have it confiscated by servants of Abimelech (verse 25). Abimelech not only denied knowledge of the incident but also seemed to mildly reproach Abraham for not bringing the matter to his personal attention (verse 26). A specific covenant was then made concerning this well, seven ewe lambs being a token of the agreement (verses 28-31). Abimelech and Phicol went their way, and Abraham commemorated his worship of the Lord in thanksgiving for this treaty by planting a tamarisk tree. And so Abraham stayed on in the land of the Philistines for some time. The lesson that Abraham learned from this was striking. He had feared for his life and for his wife among these “pagans” (20:11). God showed him that Abimelech recognized his favored status with his God and that Abimelech would not have done him bodily harm on account of this. Not only would Abimelech not take a wife that was not his, he would not even take a well that did not belong to him.

Isaac’s Sacrifice (Genesis 22:1 -24)

1. God’s Command

God’s commanded Abraham: “And He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you” (Genesis 22:2)”. God did not require Abraham to do anything that He Himself would not do. Indeed, the command to Abraham was intended to foreshadow what He would do centuries later on the cross of Calvary. Abraham’s willingness to give up his only son humanly illustrated the love of God for man, which caused Him to give His only begotten Son. The agony of heart experienced by Abraham reflected the heart of the Father at the suffering of His Son. The obedience of Isaac typified the submission of the Son to the will of the Father (Matthew 26:39,42). God halted the sacrifice of Isaac for two reasons. First, such a sacrifice would have no benefit for others. The lamb must be “without blemish,” without sin, innocent (Isaiah 53:9). This is the truth which Micah implied (6:7). Second, Abraham’s faith was amply evidenced by the fact that he was fully intending to carry out the will of God.

2. Abraham’s Obedience (22:3-10)

Regardless of the struggles which are not reported, Abraham arose early to begin the longest journey of his life: “So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him (Genesis 22:3)”. While Abraham was resigned to do God’s will, Sarah is not informed of this test (at least so far as the Scriptures record). After a heart-breaking three-day journey the mountain of sacrifice was in view. At this point Abraham left his servants behind and went on alone with Isaac: And Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you.” And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together (Genesis 22:5-6). These verses reflected a deep inner trust in God and His promises. The God Who had commanded the sacrifice of Isaac had also promised to produce a nation through him (17:15-19; 21:12). As the two went on alone climbing the mountain to the place of sacrifice, Isaac put a question to his father which must have broken his heart: “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (verse 7). The answer was painfully evident to Abraham, and yet there is in his answer not only a deliberate vagueness

but also an element of hope: “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (verse 8). At every step Abraham must have hoped for some change of plans, some alternative course of action. The place was reached, the altar built, and the wood arranged. At last there was nothing left but to bind Isaac and place him upon the wood and plunge the knife into his heart.

3. God’s Provision (22:11-14)

Only when the knife was lifted high, glistening in the sun, did God restrain Abraham from offering up his son: But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” And he said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Genesis 22:11-12). At the point of death it was evident that Abraham was willing to forsake all, even his son, his only son, for God. While God knew the heart of Abraham, Abraham’s reverence was now evident from experiential knowledge. Also at the point of total obedience came the provision of God. God did not halt the act of sacrifice; He provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac: Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son (verse 13). From this experience it was seen that Abraham’s faith that God would provide a sacrificial offering (verse 8) was honored and that God does indeed provide: And Abraham called the name of that place The Lord will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the Lord it will be provided” (verse 14).

4. God’s Promise (22:15-19)

In addition to God’s intervention to prevent Abraham’s sacrifice of his son, there was the confirmation of God’s promises to Abraham through his son: “... By Myself I have sworn,” declares the Lord, “because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Genesis 22:16-18).

Many lessons we have learned: (1) Abraham’s obedience to the revealed will of God justified his profession of faith, (2) Abraham’s obedience resulted in spiritual growth and deeper insight into the person and promises of God, (3) Abraham’s trial on Mount Moriah prepared him for the future to deal with the death of Sarah, (4) This event is a beautiful foreshadow, a type, of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ., and (5) This passage also reminds us of the importance of obedience for the Christian. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, “IN ISAAC YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED.” He *considered* that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type (Hebrews 11:17-19). The sacrifice we are called to give to God is that of our living bodies (Romans 12:3).

Dealing with Death (Genesis 23:1-20)

1. Preparation for Sarah’s Parting

A willingness to put Isaac to death enabled Abraham to accept the passing of his wife Sarah. Furthermore, the last verses of chapter 22 record an incident which would bear upon the future: “Now it came about after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, “Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your

brother Nahor: Uz his firstborn and Buz his brother and Kemuel the father of Aram and Chesed and Hazo and Pildash and Jidlaph and Bethuel.” And Bethuel become the father of *Rebekah*; these eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah and Gaham and Tahash and Maacah (Genesis 22:20-24)”. In the providence of God a wife for Isaac had already been provided long before the need had arisen. God takes care of the future in advance. “The ram is already in the bush” (22:13).

2. Abraham’s Faith Expressed in His Response to Sarah’s Death (3:1-20)

The first two verses provide the background to our chapter and also describe the grief of the patriarch: “Now Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her (Genesis 23:1-2)”. Abraham seems to have been elsewhere at the time of Sarah’s death. While some fanciful explanations exist for this fact, it would be most easily explained by Abraham being out with his flocks or something similar. When he learned of the death of his wife he came to her side to mourn for her. Sarah’s death brought Abraham to a point of decision. The practical matter was: “Where shall I bury Sarah?” The principal issue, however, was this: “Where shall I be buried?” When Abraham decided upon the burial place for Sarah, he also determined the place of his burial and of his descendants. Abraham thus approached the Hittites to purchase a burial plot for himself and his family. How strange it must have been for Abraham to petition the Hittites for a burial place in light of the often-repeated promise of God (Genesis 15:18-21). Abraham was compelled to buy a portion of the land God had promised to give him and his descendants. Furthermore, he was to purchase the land from a people that God was going to give into his hand.

As we have noted, the majority of chapter 23 is devoted to the description of a legal transaction involving the purchase of a burial plot in Canaan. Legal transactions were typically conducted at the city gate, where the city leaders were present and where witnesses were at hand. Abraham’s dealings are a model of dignity and fair play. Abraham had requested the sons of Heth (verse 3), the Hittites (verse 10), to provide him a place to bury Sarah. He acknowledged that his problem was his status as a “stranger and sojourner” among them (verse 4). Abraham asked the people to urge Ephron to sell him the cave of Machpelah, which was at the end of his field (verse 9). This was not to be a gift but a purchase at full value of the property. Abraham asked only for the cave at the end of Ephron’s field, but Ephron specified that the deal was to be a package, the field and the cave. Abraham refused the offer of the gift but did accept buying the field with the cave. Ephron persists in his offer to give Abraham the land free of charge, but he also places a value on the “gift” that is offered (four hundred pieces of silver). This accomplishes two things: it names the price, yet in a very generous way, and it makes it almost impossible for Abraham to bargain over the price. Abraham paid the price, and both men went away with what they had hoped for.

How to Find a Godly Wife (Genesis 24:1-67)

1. The Servant Commissioned (24:1-9)

Sarah had been dead three years, and Abraham was now 140 years old, so he began to make preparations for his passing. His greatest concern was the marriage of Isaac to a woman who would help him raise a godly seed, even as God had previously made clear (Genesis 18:19). Abraham entrusted the responsibility of finding a wife for Isaac to no one less than his oldest and most trusted servant (?? Eliezer of Damascus). The servant, whatever his name, was commissioned to secure a wife for Abraham’s son Isaac.

Only two stipulations were stated by Abraham: the wife must not be a Canaanite (24:3), and Isaac must not, under any circumstances, be taken back to Mesopotamia, from whence God had called him (24:6). These two requirements promote separation while preventing isolation. Isaac's presence in the land of Canaan, even when he did not possess it, evidenced his faith in God and developed devotion to and dependence upon God alone. While they lived among the Canaanites, they were not to become one with them by marriage. To move back to Mesopotamia would be isolation. To live among them but to marry a God-fearer would serve to insulate Isaac from too close a relation with these pagans. Thus, a wife must be secured from among the relatives of Abraham while, at the same time, Isaac was not allowed to return there himself. Abraham sent his servant, assured that God had led by His Word. Abraham sought a wife for his son, assured that God had prepared the way and would make that way clear. Abraham also allowed for the fact that God might not provide a wife in the way he had planned to procure her and thus made allowance for divine intervention in some other way.

2. The Search Conducted (24:10-27)

When servant's small caravan came to the "city of Nahor," he immediately sought the will and guidance of God in prayer: And he said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'—may she be the one whom Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and by this I shall know that Thou hast shown lovingkindness to my master" (Genesis 24:12-14). Wisdom had brought him this far. He was in the right city, the "city of Nahor," and he was at a good spot to observe the women of the city as they came to the spring for water. But how could he possibly judge the most important quality of a godly character? Months, even years, of observation might be required to discern the character of the women he interviewed. The servant sought to test the woman rather than God. Camels are known to be very thirsty creatures, especially after a long trek in the desert. To give the servant a drink was one thing. To give a drink to the men and then to satisfy the thirst of the camels was an entirely different matter. The servant did not plan to ask the woman for water for his camels, only for himself. She could thus meet his request quite easily, while sensing no obligation to meet the total needs of the caravan. Any woman who was willing to "go the extra mile" in this matter was one of unusual character. It was a wonderful plan, and the servant committed it to God in prayer. This unusual request reflected deep insight into human nature as well as dependence upon divine guidance. His petition was not to be denied. Indeed, it was answered even before the request was completed: And it came about before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebecca who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. And the girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar, and came up (Genesis 24:15-16).

Rebecca was, indeed, the right woman for Isaac. She was the daughter of Bethuel, Abraham's nephew. Beyond this, she was a beautiful woman who had maintained her sexual purity—essential to the preservation of a godly seed. Seemingly, she was the first to appear and the only woman there at the moment. Everything the servant saw suggested that this woman was a candidate for the test he had devised. Running to the woman, he asked for a drink. She quickly responded, lowering her jar and then returning time after time for more until the camels were satisfied. Not until the camels were thoroughly cared for did the servant speak up. While the woman's evident beauty may have satisfied the standards of lesser men, the test was to be allowed to run its course. Adorning the woman with golden gifts, the servant proceeded to deter-

mine her ancestry. When this qualification was satisfied, the servant bowed in worship, giving the glory to God for His guidance and blessing: Then the man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. And he said, 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers' (Genesis 24:26-27).

3. Securing Parental Consent (24:28-60)

While the servant worshipped, Rebecca ran on ahead to report what had happened and to begin preparations for the guests that would be coming. Rebecca's brother Laban is introduced to us here: And it came about that when he saw the ring, and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard the words of Rebecca his sister, saying, 'This is what the man said to me,' he went to the man; and behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. And he said, 'Come in, blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside since I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels?' (Genesis 24:30-31). The fact that Rebecca would need to move far away was an obstacle, which must be overcome by strong argumentation. This delicate task was skillfully handled by the servant. The urgency of his mission was indicated by his refusal to eat until the purpose of his journey was explained. First, the servant identified himself as a representative of Abraham, Bethuel's uncle (verse 34). Then the success of Abraham was reported. Isaac was said to be the sole heir of Abraham's wealth (verse 36). The conclusion of the servant's presentation is compelling: And I bowed low and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had guided me in the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. So now if you are going to deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me, and if not, let me know, that I may turn to the right hand or the left (Genesis 24:48-49). Laban and his father responded: "... The matter comes from the LORD; so we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebecca is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken" (Genesis 24:50-51).

With permission granted for Rebecca to marry Isaac, the dowry gifts were brought forth and presented to the members of the family (vs. 53). Again the servant acknowledged the hand of God in these affairs and worshipped Him gratefully (verse 52). With these matters disposed of, they ate and drank, and the servant and his party spent the night. In the morning when the servant expressed his desire to be on his way back to his master, Rebecca's mother and brother expressed their wish to delay her departure. No doubt they knew that they might never see Rebecca again, and so they wished to have some time to say their farewells. The servant, however, pressed them to let her go immediately, and so Rebecca was consulted on the matter. Since she was willing to leave without delay, they sent her off with a blessing.

4. The Return (24:61-67)

The mission had been accomplished, and now Rebecca walks in the steps of her great uncle Abraham. She, like he, was led by God to leave her homeland and relatives to go to the land of Canaan. Isaac had been in the field meditating as the evening hours approached (verse 63). As he lifted up his eyes he beheld the caravan approaching. Rebecca looked with interest upon the man who was approaching them. She asked the servant about him and learned that this man was her future husband. Appropriately, she covered herself with her veil. Isaac took Rebecca into his mother's tent, and she became his wife. His love for her blossomed and continued to grow. His marriage gave Isaac consolation for the death of his mother.

The Principle of Divine Election (Genesis 25:1-34)

1. Abraham's Death and His Descendants (25:1-11)

The point of verses 1-6 is to establish the fact that Abraham was, in fact, the father of many nations, but that it was Isaac through whom the blessings and promises of the Abrahamic Covenant would be realized. Consistent with his faith in the promises of God, Abraham gave gifts to his other children and sent them off, out of Isaac's way (verse 6). After a rich and full life Abraham died at the age of 175. This, too, was in fulfillment of the word of God to Abraham: "And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age" (Genesis 15:15). Ishmael did return to bury his father in cooperation with Isaac (verse 9). They buried him in the cave of Machpelah in the field that Abraham had purchased for Sarah, himself, and their descendants (Genesis 23). Although Abraham was dead, the purposes and promises of God remained in effect. In verse 11 Moses reminds us of this truth: "And it came about after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac lived by Beer-lahai-roi. Through Isaac the covenantal promises were to be carried on. The work of God continues, even when the saints pass away. The torch has been passed from father to son, from Abraham to Isaac.

2. Ishmael's Death and His Descendants (25:12-18)

If the first verses of chapter 25 demonstrate the faithfulness of God in keeping the promises of Genesis 17:4, then Genesis 25:12-18 reveals God's fulfillment of Genesis 17:20: And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. Abraham petitioned God to look with favor upon this boy (17:18). Verses 13-16 record the names of the sons of Ishmael, who were the twelve promised princes. Once again God kept His promise to His servant Abraham. Ishmael died at the age of 137 and was buried. Notice that he was not said to have been placed in the cave of Machpelah. The land of Canaan was not to be the possession of Ishmael nor of his descendants.

3. The Descendants of Isaac (25:19-26)

The process of election has been apparent in the previous verses. God chose Sarah, not Hagar or Keturah, to be the mother of the child of promise. God likewise chose Isaac long before he was ever born to be the heir of Abraham. While Abraham had several wives and many children, only Isaac was to be the one through whom the promised blessings would come. In verses 19-26 we see that the process of election continues. Here it is Jacob who is designated as the child of promise as opposed to his twin brother Esau, the one who by a natural course of events would have been the heir of promise.

Isaac married Rebecca when he was 40, but it was 20 years later before she bore him children. Isaac interceded with God on Rebecca's behalf, and she became pregnant in answer to his prayers (verse 21). During her pregnancy Rebecca was perplexed by the intense struggle that took place within her womb, so she inquired of God to determine the reason. The answer from the Lord verified the significance of the activity within Rebecca's womb: And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples shall be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23).

This prophecy is a very significant revelation not only for Rebecca but also for Christians in our age because it indicates the principle of divine election. Before the birth of the children God determined that it would be the younger child who would possess the birthright and thus be the heir of Isaac so far as the covenant promises were concerned. In Romans 9 the Apostle Paul referred to this incident as an illustration of the principle of election: And not only this, but there was Rebecca also, when she had conceived twins by one

man, our father Isaac, for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger' (Romans 9:10-12). The principle of election is based upon the "foreknowledge" of their works in the future. Esau was born first, and he came from the womb red and hairy. The name Esau somewhat resembles the sound of the word meaning 'hairy' – Edom. Jacob came forth from the womb grasping the heel of his brother Esau. Jacob's name was suggested by the Hebrew word for 'heel.'

4. The Barter of the Birthright (25:27-34)

Jacob was entirely different. While Esau seems to have been aggressive, daring, and flamboyant, Jacob appears to be just the opposite: quiet, pensive, more interested in staying at home than in venturing out and making great physical conquests. The second factor, which tended to separate the two sons was the divided loyalty between their parents. Isaac favored Esau, while, Rebecca, on the other hand, favored Jacob. The third factor which Moses recorded for us in chapter 25 was the underhanded means by which Jacob wrested the birthright from his brother. While Esau had been out in the field, Jacob had been at home preparing a stew. Esau was enticed by the fragrant aroma of the meal. Esau greedily pled for some of "that red stuff." Jacob bartered, "... First sell me your birthright" (25:31). With this Esau's carnal nature emerged, "... Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" (25:32). With an exaggerated estimation of his physical condition and need and a minimal appreciation for the value of his birthright, Esau was willing to exchange his destiny for a dinner. Jacob was not willing to let Esau take the occasion as casually as he was inclined to; therefore, he made him swear a solemn oath declaring the sale of the birthright. This done, the meal was served, and Esau went on his way. As Moses concluded his report of this event, we find his estimation of Esau's character: "... Thus Esau despised his birthright" (25:34). And so it is that the writer to the Hebrews can speak of Esau as a man who has no appreciation whatsoever for spiritual and eternal things: See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal (Hebrews 12:15-16). Note that the most important character of the birthright is the birth of Christ, the Savior.

Isaac Walks in His Father's Steps (Genesis 26:1-35)

1. A Reiteration of the Abrahamic Covenant (26:1-6)

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines (Genesis 26:1). Isaac went to Gerar to avoid the famine. While in Gerar, Isaac decided to go down to Egypt just as his father had done (Genesis 12:10ff.). This was not according to the plan which God had for Isaac, and so He appeared to him with this word of instruction and promise: Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath, which I swore to your father Abraham. And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My Laws (Genesis 26:2b-5).

2. A Repetition of Abraham's Sin (26:7-11)

Isaac succumbs to the temptation to pass off his wife as his sister. When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he was afraid to say, “My wife,” thinking “The men of the place might kill me on account of Rebecca, for she is beautiful” (Genesis 26:7). Abimelech learned of the deception by observing the conduct of Isaac with Rebecca. He did not treat her like a sister, but like a wife, for when he saw Isaac caressing Rebecca he said, “... Behold, certainly she is your wife! ...” (verse 9). After discovering Isaac’s deception, Abimelech ordered that neither Isaac nor his wife was to be harmed (Genesis 26:11). Isaac was not instructed to leave, nor was he encouraged to stay. He was simply tolerated.

3. Return to the Place of Blessing (26:12-25)

Staying on in Gerar after Abimelech had confronted him, Isaac harvested a bumper crop: Now Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the LORD blessed him, and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him (Genesis 26:12-14). In spite of Isaac’s deception, God poured out His blessings upon him. Abimelech knew also that the Philistines were growing uneasy about Isaac’s presence in the land. Isaac was rather threatening personally not only because of his prosperity and power but also because of his father Abraham: Now all the wells which his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth (Genesis 26:15). The sentiments of the Philistines were concisely expressed in Abimelech’s terse suggestion that Isaac depart from Gerar (verse 16). Essentially, Isaac refused to stay where there was conflict and hostility. He not only re-opened the wells once dug by his father, but he dug other wells also. In the valley of Gerar Isaac dug a well that produced “living water,” that is, water that originated from a spring—running water, not simply water that was contained. The Philistine herdsmen disputed with the herdsmen of Isaac over it, so Isaac moved on. Another well was dug, and there was yet another dispute (verse 21). Finally a well was dug that brought about no opposition. This well was named “Rehoboth,” signifying the hope Isaac had that this was the place God had designated for him to stay.

Then he went up from there to Beersheba (verse 23). Beersheba was the first place that Abraham had gone with Isaac after they came down from the “sacrifice” on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:19). And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham; Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you, and multiply your descendants, For the sake of My servant Abraham” (Genesis 26:24). So he built an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac’s servants dug a well (Genesis 26:25).

4. The Witness of Abimelech (26:26-33)

Abimelech, Ahuzzath, and Phicol all paid a state visit to Isaac. Isaac’s irritation as well as his curiosity can be seen in his interrogation: “... Why have you come to me, since you hate me, and have sent me away from you?” (Genesis 26:27). And they said, “We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good, and have sent you away in peace. *You are now* the blessed of the LORD’” (Genesis 26:28-29). They made the covenant with Isaac and ate on his table, then in the morning they went on their own way. On the same day, Isaac’s servants came in and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, “We have found water.” So he called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day (Genesis 26:32-33). The place of God’s presence is also the place of God’s provision.

5. Regret Due to Esau's Marriages (26:34-35)

Serving God does not guarantee a trouble-free life and one of rose-strewn paths. There were still heartaches for Isaac and Rebecca; Esau was the source of much of their sorrow and grief: And when Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they made life miserable for Isaac and Rebecca (Genesis 26:34-35).

Working Like the Devil, Serving the Lord (Genesis 27:1-46)

1. The Conspiracy of Isaac and Esau (27:1-4)

Normally the birthright belonged to the eldest son. This entitled him to a double share of the property in addition to the privilege of assuming the father's position of headship in the family. For the descendants of Abraham it determined the one through whom the covenant blessings would be given. These four verses characterize the attempt of Isaac and Esau to regain the blessings of God as promised to Abraham, and spoken to Isaac. The first character is urgency because Isaac was old, perhaps 137 years old. The second is secrecy. Normally the blessing would have been given before the entire family, but during the conversation between Isaac and Esau neither Jacob nor Rebecca were present. The third character is conspiracy. Finally, the compelling evidence of Esau's disqualification for spiritual headship is his marriage to two Canaanite wives (Genesis 26:34). God's purposes for His people could never be achieved through such a person

2. The Counter-Conspiracy of Rebecca and Jacob (27:5-17)

Rebecca served as a counter-spy in the service of her son, Jacob. The text tells us that she "was listening" to the conversation between Isaac and Esau. Rebecca and Jacob put a plan to fool Isaac. And Jacob answered his mother Rebecca, "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, then I shall be as a deceiver in his sight; and I shall bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing" (Genesis 27:11-12). Rebecca had a ready answer for this objection. She promised to assume the negative consequences personally if anything were to go wrong "Let any curse against you fall on me, my son; just do as I say, and go get the goats for me. So he went to get them and brought them to her and she cooked the kind of food that his father liked (Genesis 27:13-15)".

3. Jacob Believes the Big Lie (27:18-29)

The of Jacob And Rebecca grew bigger and bigger. It began with the words "I am Esau your first-born" (verse 19). From this, lie began to be piled upon lie: "I have done as you told me" (verse 19); "eat of my game" (verse 19). In response to Isaac's penetrating question, "Are you really my son Esau?," Jacob replied, "I am" (verse 24). And Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the LORD your God caused it to happen to me." Isaac failed to know his son as a result of several forces. First of all, Isaac is the victim of old age. His eyes are dim (verse 1) so that he cannot distinguish between what is genuine and what is artificial. His senses are somewhat dulled by age as well, or so it would seem. He did not perceive the difference between goat and game. He could not differentiate between goatskin and that of his son Esau. Then, too, Isaac's judgment seems to have been impaired by his haste. It was obvious that Isaac wanted to get this over with as soon as possible. Isaac ate Jacob's meal and finally, he gave the blessings to Jacob thinking that he is his son Esau.

4. Isaac Learns and Esau Burns (27:30-40)

While Isaac loved the taste of Jacob's "game," Jacob savored the taste of his victory over Esau. Esau came to his father and said to: "Let my father rise, and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me" (verse 31). Sure it was a tragic situation, while, Isaac had tried to give everything to Esau, there was nothing left that could be considered a blessing to his favorite son, for all had been given to Jacob. Esau begged Isaac to bless him but he answered "Your brother came and deceived me. He has taken away your blessing (Genesis 27:35)" The consequences for Rebecca and Jacob are recorded in verses 41-45, but the tragic results of the conspiracy of Isaac and Esau are seen sooner. Esau learned that there comes a point of no return in every man's life when regret cannot bring a reversal of past decisions. As I understand the Bible, all who have rejected Christ as Savior will live in eternal regret and remorse, but this will not overturn the consequences of living with their decision to live in independence from God (cf. Luke 16:19-31; Philippians 2:9-11; II Thessalonians 1:6-10; Revelation 20:11-15).

5. Rebecca and Jacob Have a Price to Pay (27:41-46)

For Rebecca and her son Jacob the price tag for their success was as costly as that of Isaac and Esau for their defeat. Rebecca loved Jacob more than life itself and, seemingly, more than Isaac did. She sought his success at any price, even deception and deceit. The price she paid was separation from her son, which appears to have lasted for the rest of her life. So far as we can detect, once Jacob left for Haran he never saw his mother again. Rebecca underestimated the consequences of this sin, for she thought that Jacob would only need to be gone for a short time—until the death of Isaac (27:44). But Isaac lived for a good forty years until he died at age 180 (35:28). Jacob faced the inevitable results of sin also. He must have felt an alienation from his father, whom he had not only deceived but also mocked. He now had a brother who despised him and who looked for the day when he could put him to death (verse 41). And worst of all, he had to leave the mother he loved. In addition to this, all that he had gained in a material way he was unable to enjoy because he had to leave it behind to flee for his life. Sin does not pay!

The Seeker Is Sought (Genesis 28:1-22)

1. Jacob's Farewell and Esau's Frustration (28:1-9)

While the consequences for failure to pull off the deception of Isaac had been carefully considered, neither Rebecca nor Jacob had weighed the cost of success. Isaac had been deceived and mocked due to the frailties of his age. Esau was deeply resentful, looking forward to the time when he could kill his brother (27:41). Rebecca must have found the gap between herself and her husband (not to mention Esau) widened by her deception of her mate. More than this, Rebecca now perceived that Jacob would have to leave until emotions cooled, although she had no conception of how long this separation must last. The final verse of chapter 27 describes the skillful manipulation of Isaac by Rebecca, leading him to the inevitable conclusion that Jacob should be sent away to Haran, the city of her brother Laban: And Rebecca said to Isaac, "I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?" (Genesis 27:46). Isaac sent his son, Jacob, away to Haran to Laban, the brother of Rebecca "So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother" (Genesis 28:1-2). So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father

Isaac; and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth (Genesis 28:6-9).

2. Jacob's Departure and His Dream (28:10-22)

On his journey to Paddan-aram, Jacob was accompanied only by his staff (32:10) and his thoughts. Jacob left Beersheba and started toward Haran. Night seems to have overtaken Jacob before he arrived at the city of Luz. The city gates would have been closed for the night, so Jacob, as shepherds customarily did, slept under the stars. He found a suitable spot, took a stone from nearby, and propped himself up for the night. In his sleep he had an awe-inspiring vision. He saw a ladder reaching from heaven to earth, with angels ascending and descending upon it. Above this ladder was God, who spoke these words to him: I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you (Genesis 28:13-15). The words spoken by God are very similar to previous declarations to Abraham and to Isaac. Isaac's pronouncement that passed on the blessing of Abraham to Jacob (verse 4) was now confirmed by God Himself. While there are various aspects to these covenant blessings, foremost seems to be the references to the land: ... the land on which you lie; I will give it to you ... (verse 13) ... and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south ... (verse 14) ... and will bring you back to this land ... (verse 15) Jacob perceived the significance of the place, too, for he immediately narrowed his thinking to the awesomeness of the place where he lay: ... surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it (verse 16). ... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven (verse 17).

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top. And he called the name of the place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz (Genesis 28:18-19). The pillar was to serve as a memorial. It marked a place to which he would return to build an altar and worship God.. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God" (Genesis 28:20-21). Jacob Made a Promise " And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee (Genesis 28:22)".

I Led Two Wives (Genesis 29:1 -30)

1. Jacob arrives at Haran (29:1-12)

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east. And he looked, and saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large. When all the flocks were gathered there, they would then roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well (Genesis 29:1-3). And Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." And he said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nabor?" And they said, "We know him." And he said to them, "Is it well with him?" And they said, "It is well, and behold, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep" (Genesis 29:4-6). Jacob wanted to learn how far

he was from his destination. The shepherds' response told him he was very near to Haran. In the meantime, Jacob inquired about a matter, which struck him as quite unusual: And he said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered. Water the sheep, and go pasture them." But they said, "We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered, and they roll the stone from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep" (Genesis 29:7-8). During the course of this conversation Rachel arrived. While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. And it came about, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went up, and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and that he was Rebecca's son, and she ran and told her father (Genesis 29:9-12).

2. Seven Years Till Wedding Night (29:13-20)

When Rachel ran home with her report of meeting Jacob, Laban was quick to respond: So it came about, when Laban heard the news of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Then he related to Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him a month (Genesis 29:13-14). Jacob's month-long stay with Laban had at least two results. First, it brought Jacob and Rachel into close contact and helped to kindle a deep affection for each other. Jacob now had a reason to stay with Laban. And as for Laban, this month proved Jacob to be a most valuable worker. Jacob would make a fine son-in-law and could stay on to work for Laban. This month brought both Laban and Jacob to the conclusion that a continuing relationship between them could be of mutual advantage. At the end of that month, Laban sought to formalize the relationship between himself and Jacob: Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" (Genesis 29:15). Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the oldest was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face (Genesis 29:16-17). Leah means "wild cow" and she had "weak eyes" (verse 17). Rachel is characterized only by her physical attractiveness. She was "beautiful of form and face" (verse 17). Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel" (Genesis 29:18). Laban's response was positive but somewhat vague: ... It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man; stay with me (Genesis 29:19). So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her (Genesis 29:20).

3. Shock at First Light (29:21-30)

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her" (Genesis 29:21). And Laban gathered all the men of the place, and made a feast. Now it came about in the evening that he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to him; and Jacob went in to her. Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?" (Genesis 29:22-25). For seven years Jacob had waited for this day. Early the next morning Jacob awoke. What a shock as the sunlight burst into the tent to reveal that the woman in his arms was Leah, not Rachel! Jacob said to Laban: "What is this you have done to me. The shoe is now on the other foot; the deceiver has now been deceived. Those who choose to live by the sword die by it. Laban was not taken back by Jacob's rebuke. He had probably planned his response to this question long before this confrontation took place. But Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place, to marry off the

younger before the first-born. Complete the bridal week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years.” And Jacob did so and completed her week, and he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. Laban also gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid. So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years (Genesis 29:26-30). The end result was that Laban married off both his daughters. Also, he managed to get a premium price for both. Jacob ended up with two wives rather than one, and he worked twice as hard to get what he desired.

The Battle of the Brides (Genesis 29:31-30:24)

1. Leah Longs for Love: (29:31-35)

Now the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben, for she said, “Because the LORD has seen my affliction; surely now my husband will love me” (Genesis 29:31-32). Then she conceived again and bore a son and said, “Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also.” So she named him Simeon (Genesis 29:33). No change in Jacob’s attitudes or actions had been perceived by Leah, and so when the second son was born she acknowledged the child as the tender response of a loving God who knew the very thoughts of her heart. The name Simeon, “he hears,” gave testimony to Leah’s awareness of the grace of her God. With the birth of her third son, Leah’s hope for Jacob’s tenderness and affection was once again aroused: And she conceived again and bore a son and said, “Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” Therefore he was named Levi (Genesis 29:34). While three sons did little to change Jacob’s heart, the birth of the fourth was the occasion for Leah’s most devout expression of praise and thanksgiving toward the God Who had heard her prayers: And she conceived again and bore a son and said, “This time I will praise the LORD.” Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing (Genesis 29:35).

2. Rachel Fumes at Leah’s Fertility (30:1-8)

Praising God was easy for Leah with four sons at her side; however, seeing her sister’s blessing only aroused jealousy in Rachel: Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or else I die.” Then Jacob’s anger burned against Rachel, and he said, “Am I in the place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” (Genesis 30:1-2). On this occasion neither Rachel nor Jacob responded in what could be called a pious manner. Rachel, desperately jealous of Leah’s fruitfulness, demanded children of Jacob. Rather than recognize her barrenness as coming from the hand of God, she sought to shift the blame to Jacob. It was his entire fault, she insisted. Jacob did not respond well to this kind of demand. Like Rachel, Rebecca had been barren, but Isaac’s response was quite different from Jacob’s. He prayed on behalf of Rebecca, and on his behalf God gave his wife children (Genesis 25:21). No such prayers are mentioned here, nor are we told that God answered the prayers of Jacob. We are only told that God heard the petitions of the wives (30:17,22). While we are told that Jacob had a great love for Rachel (29:18,20,30), it is not very evident at this difficult time in Rachel’s life. Her jealousy implies that she lacks assurance of Jacob’s love. She fears not having children, and because of that she makes a desperate proposal: And she said, “Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children.” So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore a son. Then Rachel said, “God has vin-

licated me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son.” Therefore she named him Dan (Genesis 30:3-6).

There are definite similarities between this proposal and that of Sarai in Genesis 16. Each intended to adopt the child born from the union of her husband and her maid, but here the similarity stops. Sarai made her proposal at a time when Abram had no children (16:1), while Jacob already had several sons through Leah before Rachel’s proposal. While Sarai’s proposal came more from circumstances which seemed to demand desperate measures, Rachel’s demand stemmed from her own pride and jealousy. She must have children of her own, and she would take any steps necessary to get them. The results were as Rachel had hoped, Dan was borne by Bilhah. The name Dan meant “judged.” She claimed that God had judged the matter of her dispute with her sister Leah and had sided with her as proven by the birth of this child. And Rachel’s maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. So Rachel said, “With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and I have indeed prevailed.” And she named him Naphtali (Genesis 30:7-8). At this point in her life Rachel does not strike me as a spiritual woman in humble submission to the will of God.

3. Leah Learns a Lesson (30:9-13)

How far Leah falls from her grateful acceptance of God’s blessings in previous verses. Rachel, while undoubtedly wrong in proposing that Jacob sleep with Bilhah, at least can be understood to have been reacting to her barrenness; but Leah already has four sons of her own. There was no need to give her maid Zilpah to Jacob for a wife—other than the fact that this was what Rachel had done. Leah and Rachel are in a head-to-head confrontation. If Rachel can employ her maid in this contest, so can she. When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. And Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, “How fortunate!” So she named him Gad. And Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, “Happy am I! For women will call me happy.” So she named him Asher (Genesis 30:9-13).

4. The Purchase of a Potion (30:14-21)

Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.” But she said to her, “Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son’s mandrakes also?” So Rachel said, “Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son’s mandrakes.” When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, “You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son’s mandrakes.” So he lay with her that night. And God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, “God has given me my wages, because I gave my maid to my husband.” So she named him Issachar (Genesis 30:14-18). Mandrakes were berries found in that part of the world, which were thought to stimulate the desire for “love-making” and also to enhance the chances of conception. Rachel greatly desired to use some of these berries and asked Leah for some of them. Leah’s strong retort reminds us that, in her mind, it was Rachel who had stolen her husband from her. She viewed herself as Jacob’s legitimate wife rather than Rachel, who was merely his romantic preference. Leah needed something to get Jacob interested in her, to get him to want to come into her tent. Since Rachel nearly always was the one with whom Jacob spent the night, she could assure Leah that Jacob would sleep with her this night. Thus, whether Leah was appealing or not, she would get what she

wanted: Jacob, alone, for the night. In exchange for this one night, Rachel got the mandrakes, which she hoped would enable her to conceive.

Her night with Jacob did bring about what Leah had hoped for, another son. It was not because of mandrakes but because God had compassion on her that she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. It must be in spite of her bargaining with Rachel and not because of it that God blessed Leah. Finally, Leah is reported to give birth to a sixth son and also a daughter: And Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. Then Leah said, “God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons.” So she named him Zebulun. And afterward she bore a daughter and named her Dinah (Genesis 30:19-21). The report of Dinah’s birth is intended to introduce her to us in preparation for the tragic events of Genesis 34. Other daughters were born (46:15), but she is the one who receives the greatest attention.

5. Rachel is Remembered (30:22-24)

After all of Rachel’s devices and schemes have been exhausted, yet without any children from her own womb, God grants her the desire of her heart: Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. So she conceived and bore a son and said, “God has taken away my reproach.” And she named him Joseph, saying, “May the LORD give me another son” (Genesis 30:22-23). The name “Joseph” is significant in two ways. The Hebrew word *’asap*, “has taken away,” has reference to the removal of the barrenness which had so plagued Rachel. A similar sounding word, *yosep*, “may ... add,” expresses the further hope of Rachel that she be given the privilege of having yet another son to present to her husband. It must have been nearly seven years after her marriage to Jacob that Rachel finally bore him a son. There may be significance to this delay. Jacob, due to his deception and deceit, was delayed in the process of getting a wife for himself. Perhaps Rachel was delayed in her attempts to have a child for the same reasons. She, too, was willing to employ questionable methods to obtain a son. Only after all these futile efforts were thwarted and shown to be without result does God open Rachel’s womb, and that may be in answer to her prayers. Rachel is yet to have another child, but he will come at the cost of her own life (35:16).

Jacob Gets Laban’s Goat (Genesis 30:25-31:16)

1. Laban’s New Deal (30:25-36)

The fourteen years of service for Leah and Rachel must have been fulfilled shortly after the birth of Joseph. Just as Jacob reminded Laban that it was time to take his wife (29:21), so he must seek his release so that he might return to his homeland and family. Having fulfilled his obligation to Laban, Jacob was free to go, but Laban was reluctant to see this happen. He had come to realize that his prosperity was the result of Jacob’s presence (verse 27). So Laban began to negotiate Jacob to stay. Normally goats in that land were black or dark brown, seldom white or spotted with white. On the other hand, the sheep were nearly always white, infrequently black or spotted. Jacob offered to continue working as a tender of the flocks if he were but to receive the rarer of the offspring.

Jacob would examine the flocks that day, removing all those animals, which would later be marked so as to be his property. These animals would be taken three days’ distance and kept by Laban’s sons. Only those newly born spotted or striped would become Jacob’s property. At some later time the herd would be examined, and the spotted or striped animals would go to Jacob, while the rest would be Laban’s. Removing

the spotted and striped which were in the flock benefited Laban in two ways. First, it left these animals to him, not Jacob. Also, it lessened the chances of other spotted or striped animals being conceived, since these would not be mating with the flock.

It was too good to be true, Laban must have thought. How could he possibly lose? However, it was an open-ended agreement, which encouraged Jacob to attempt to manipulate the outcome and also left God free to overrule the normal course of nature in order to bless Jacob. The agreement was solidified, and the flocks were divided, with Jacob tending the unspotted, unspeckled, and unstriped animals of Laban.

2. Jacob's Wheeling and Dealing (30:37-43)

Jacob employed three techniques to increase his chance of getting spotted animals. The first method Jacob used (verses 37-39) was peeled poles, which were supposed to have some kind of prenatal influence on the flocks. Jacob supposed that if the flocks had a visual impression of stripes while they were mating and conceiving, the offspring would assume this same form. So all about the trenches, which served as watering troughs, Jacob placed these peeled poles (verse 39). The second phase of Jacob's plan to predispose the outcome of his labors was to segregate the flocks. The striped, speckled, and spotted offspring (which belonged to Jacob) were put off by themselves. The rest of the flock was faced toward those animals, which were either striped, or all black (verse 40). While the peeled poles were artificial, the striped animals were the "real McCoy." Surely by seeing these animals, the rest of the flock would get the idea. The third phase was a stroke of genius (verses 41-42). Jacob placed his peeled poles only in front of the superior animals and not before the weaker. In Jacob's mind the result was that the strong animals went to him, while the weak went to Laban (verse 42). From everything that has been said, we would naturally conclude that the great prosperity of Jacob (verse 43) was due to his shrewd techniques for manipulating the outcome of the mating of the flocks. However, the real reason for Jacob's prosperity. But mark this well—Jacob did not prosper because he pulled one over on Laban. Jacob's success was not the product of his schemes.

3. Laban's Hard Feelings (31:1-16)

Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth." And Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not friendly toward his as formerly (Genesis 31:1-2). Then God instructed Jacob to return back to his homeland and to his relatives. Jacob did not worry about convincing his father-in-law (verses 17ff.), but he did find it necessary to have the support of his wives. They must now choose between their father and their husband. In order to have a private conversation, Jacob called his wives to him in the field.

A Dirty Deal

Jacob's first line of defense was to the effect that their father had given him a dirty deal (verses 5-9). Things were not as they used to be. For some unknown reason Laban's attitude had strangely changed toward Jacob. While not favored by Laban, God has been on Jacob's side. Jacob has worked hard (verse 6), but Laban has been the cheater (verse 7). Continually Laban changed the terms of their agreement (verse 8). The evidence of Jacob's integrity is that God had vindicated him by giving him the flocks of Laban. That proved his innocence.

A Divine Directive

Besides this, God had spoken to Jacob confirming His blessing and directing him to return to the land of promise (verses 10-13). Jacob then reported the content of the dream he recently had, which further confirmed the righteousness of his actions and the rightness of his return to his homeland. At least Jacob was able to convince his wives that it was right to leave Laban. They recognized that they no longer were in their father's favor. He favored his sons and considered Jacob and his wives only a liability. There was no love lost between these women and their father. They would not find it hard to leave Laban and join Jacob in his return to his homeland.

The Difference Between Legality and Morality (Genesis 31:17-55)

1. Jacob's Escape (31:17-21)

Two wrongs are thus committed in the departure of Jacob and his family from Paddan-aram. First, Jacob has left without telling Laban about it and at a time when it would have been inconvenient for him to prevent it. Second, Rachel had stolen Laban's family gods, which were the token of the right to claim a portion of Laban's inheritance and the headship of the family. Jacob was doing the will of God in returning to the land of promise, but he was not doing so in God's way.

2. Laban's Pursuit (31:22-35)

By the time Laban had rushed home, discovered the loss of his gods, and gathered the relatives. After seven days Laban caught up with Jacob, but his intentions were certainly altered by the divine warning contained in the dream he had the night before the two men met face to face. The message Laban received was a simple one: "Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad" (verse 24). When Laban confronted Jacob the following day, God's warning did not prevent him from rebuking him for his hasty departure, which deprived him from any kind of farewell. Laban works very hard at playing the part of the offended father and grandfather whose deep affection for his daughters and grandchildren caused him much agony when he found they had secretly left without any good-bye's. The real bone of contention was the stolen gods: "... but why did you steal my gods?" (verse 30). This was the bottom line. This was the reason for the hot pursuit accompanied by other relatives who were probably prepared to fight. This explains why God warned Laban not to do anything harmful to Jacob. Jacob's response was not made from a position of strength. His first words are a rather weak defense of his stealthy escape, while his remaining words are in response to the matter of the stolen gods, of which he had no personal knowledge (Genesis 31:31-32). Jacob was not certain that Laban would let him go without a fight. Perhaps he would not let his daughters go either. Feeling certain that he was innocent of the charge of stealing Laban's gods, Jacob turned the conversation to this issue. Laban was urged to make a diligent search of Jacob's goods to try and find his gods. Whoever was caught with them would die. Jacob obviously had no idea that his favorite, his beloved Rachel, was the culprit. That Laban was most interested in his gods, not in good-bye's, is seen by his subsequent actions (Genesis 31:33-35)

Having searched carefully in Jacob's tent, Laban went on to Leah's tent and then to the two maids. Only last did he come to the tent of Rachel. She was the least suspect of all, and yet she was the guilty party. She successfully concealed her theft by a clever distraction. She sat on the very saddle, which hid the gods of Laban. When he had searched every other part of the tent, she explained that she must remain seated because of her monthly infirmity, common to women. Laban did not wish to press that matter any further, and so Rachel's theft was not discovered. Jacob reveled in his innocence in addition to the assurance he gained

from Laban's report that God had spoken to him in the night, preventing harm to Jacob. Then Jacob became angry and contended with Laban.

3. The Covenant of Peace (31:43-55)

Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. And Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. Now Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. And Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." Therefore it was named Galeed; and Mizpah, for he said, "May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me." And Laban said to Jacob, "Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain. And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place (Genesis 31:43-55).

How to Win With God and Men (Genesis 32:1-32)

1. An Alarming Report (32:3-12)

Jacob felt compelled to contact his brother Esau. He wished to inform his brother of his approach and, even more, to assure him of his kind intentions. The substance of his message to Esau was that he had returned a wealthy man. In this case he was not coming back in order to place a claim on his father's wealth. Jacob sought to assure Esau that his return was a friendly and non-threatening one. All that he sought was Esau's favor. Jacob is on his way to becoming a different kind of person, and this message is the first indication of it. The messengers' report of Esau's response to Jacob's message was frightening: Esau was on his way to meet Jacob, accompanied by 400 men. Jacob had little reason for optimism. Verses 7-12 record for us Jacob's two-fold response to the word he had received that Esau and company were rapidly approaching. Assuming the very worst, Jacob divided his company into two divisions. His thought was that while one group might be attacked, the other had a chance to escape (verse 8). The prayer of Jacob reveals a decided change in his outlook, and Jacob prayed fearing that Esau was to be upon him momentarily. Beyond this, the prayer evidences a new humility in Jacob. "I am not worthy ..." (verse 10) is now Jacob's confession. The smug self-confidence is gone, and so is the bargaining mentality. Jacob has no way to manipulate God as he has done others. God's promises are the only basis upon which he can make his petition, and so he concluded his prayer, "For thou did say ..." (verse 12).

2. An Appeasing Response (32:13-21)

Vital faith need not be idle faith. Faith without works, James reminds us (James 2:14ff.), is dead. The actions of Jacob described in these verses certainly indicate a clever strategy behind, but there is nothing intrinsically wrong in what he does. Jacob sends wave upon wave of gifts to Esau, stressing the new nature he

has which makes him want to give rather than to receive and to serve rather than to supplant. Consequently, Jacob divided the gift of livestock into separate droves, each tended by servants who followed their flocks. First there were goats, next sheep, then camels, cows, and finally, donkeys. Usually the females were accompanied by a smaller number of males, which would serve as breeding stock to make the herds of Esau larger and larger as time went on. It was a gift, which would make Esau prosperous. As Esau approached nearer to Jacob he must pass by each drove of livestock. Those who tended these animals were carefully instructed how to answer Esau's inquiry as to whose livestock these were and where they were heading. Each was to inform Esau that these were Jacob's livestock, a gift to Esau, and that Jacob would be found further back. The cumulative effect was hoped to appease Esau's wrath and soften his anger (verse 20). Again, Jacob and his family spent the night in the camp.

3. An Angelic Wrestler (32:22-32)

For some undisclosed reason Jacob was compelled to break camp in the middle of the night. He first saw to it that his wives and maids crossed the Jabbok, along with their children. Then the rest of the goods were transported to the other side as well. It would appear that while Jacob was making his last trip to the original campsite before joining his family on the other side of the Jabbok he was confronted by a "man" who would oppose his crossing over to the other side and who would threaten to keep Jacob from entering the land of Canaan. We know that this "man" (verse 24) was the pre-incarnate Son of God, Who appeared in human flesh. This is certain in the light of Jacob's words: "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved" (32:30). The struggle was not a dream or a nightmare. It was a struggle which God Himself initiated: "Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak" (32:24). Jacob was mistaken if he reasoned that Esau was the barrier to his entrance into Canaan and the blessings of God. In this wrestling match it was not Esau who opposed Jacob, but it was God Himself. It must be pointed out that Moses did not tell us that God could not overcome Jacob, only that he did not. At this point the Angel disabled Jacob by dislocating his hip. Jacob, at the very point of being incapacitated, seemed to gain the upper hand. The Angel pleads with him to be let go, for the dawn was breaking. It looks as though the Angel did not wish to be seen in the daylight. The Angel implied to Jacob that he now had the winning edge (contrary to the reality of the dislocated hip). Jacob was tested by being encouraged to make a request of the Angel, which He was in no position to refuse. Unlike his previous actions, Jacob asked only for a blessing (verse 26). Finally, Jacob had come to realize that the only important thing in life is to be blessed of God. Esau could neither provide nor prevent the blessing of God. It was not Esau that stood in the way of Jacob's blessing in the land of Canaan. On the one hand, it was God Who opposed him. On the other, it was Jacob himself, who by means of his trickery and treachery, his cunning and deceit attempted to produce spiritual blessings through carnal means. The blessing of God must be obtained from God himself, and this must be done by clinging to Him in helpless dependence, not by trying to manipulate Him. That is the picture, which is conveyed by this struggle in the night hours between Jacob and his God. A realization of this fact brought about a dramatic change in the character and conduct of Jacob, and thus his name was changed to reflect this transformation. The Angel of the Lord asked his name, and he had to reply, "Jacob," which meant "the supplanter." This must have been as uncomfortable for Jacob as it was for childless Abraham to refer to himself by his name, which meant "father of a multitude." No longer should Jacob be known as a supplanter, for now he was a man who prospered because of his faith in the purposes and power of his God, and so the name Israel was given him. Prayerfully prevailing with God assures us of prevailing with men. If God is on our side, we cannot be overcome. This is what verse 28 was intended to convey to Jacob. In learning how to prevail with God, Jacob had also found God's means of prevailing with men.

One Step Forward and Three Backward (Genesis 33:1–34:31)

1. One Step Forward (33:1-16)

Jacob looked up and saw Esau and his 400 men appear on the horizon. Jacob divided his wives and children into groups, beginning with the maids and ending with Rachel and Joseph. Jacob went to the head of the group so that any harm done would be inflicted on him first. It was he whom Esau hated; ultimately it was a confrontation between these two brothers. As Jacob went out to meet his brother, he bowed repeatedly to the ground, a token of his newly found humility. Now this was a very dramatic moment. Esau perhaps rode rapidly up to Jacob and then leaped from his mount and ran toward his brother. Esau came as a forgiving friend and brother rather than as a foe.

The usual small talk began with questions about the wives and children. Then the conversation turned to the droves of livestock that met him on his approach. Jacob explained once again that they were a gift, an expression of love. Esau tried politely to refuse the gift as unnecessary and unneeded, but Jacob persisted and prevailed.

2. One Step Backward (33:17)

Jacob moved to Succoth, which was in the opposite direction of Seir where Jacob had told Esau he was coming. For the change of moving to Succoth, several could be suggested. First, Jacob may not have been eager to face his father, whom he had deceived and of whom he should seek forgiveness. Also, Jacob may not have been too excited about spending much time in close proximity to Esau, who was obviously well able to protect his own interests. Furthermore, Jacob had made a vow to pay a tithe to God at Bethel (28:22). Finally, and perhaps most likely, the pasture was vastly superior in the Jordan Valley where Succoth was located, while Bethel was in the mountains.^v His cattle would normally fare better in the richer pastures of the Jordan Valley than in the mountains.

More distressing than the direction of Jacob's travels was the duration of his stay at Succoth. We know that Dinah could not have been older than 6 or 7 when Jacob left Paddan-aram, for she was seemingly born later to Leah (30:21). But by the time Jacob is at Shechem, she is of marriageable age, which would have been at least 12 or 13. Several years must, therefore, have passed between the meeting of Jacob and Esau and the events of chapter 34. Some of those must have passed at Succoth. This is further confirmed by the fact that Jacob built a house there rather than to dwell in a tent (verse 17). He was not a sojourner here, but a settler. There is every indication that Jacob intended to "settle down" for some time.

3. A Second Backward Step (33:18-20)

We are not given any reason for Jacob's departure from Succoth to Shechem. Jacob arrived "safely" at the city of Shechem (verse 18), he purchased a piece of property from a man whose name he would some day like to forget. He has built an altar, which he called El-Elohe-Israel

4. A Third Backward Step (34:1-31)

Jacob must have been ignorant of the dangers of the city. As close as he lived to Shechem, Dinah found it easy to visit with "the daughters of the land" (verse 1). More than likely, this occurred frequently, and so her involvement with Shechem might not have taken place quite as suddenly as it would appear. On a particular occasion Shechem was able to seize her while she was alone and to force his affections on her. While his rape of Dinah was an abomination, he had a great love for her and desired to marry her. He urged

his father to arrange for their marriage as soon as possible, regardless of the price. Hamor's offer was one that could have been expected from a Canaanite who was a man of prominence within the community. He sought to assuage the anger of Dinah's brothers by stressing the great love of Shechem for her (verses 7-8). In addition, such a union would pave the way for many other benefits. They could be free to inter-marry with the Canaanites (verse 9) and also to engage in business more freely (verse 10). Furthermore, whatever they required as a dowry would be paid. Probably Hamor felt that a high price for Dinah would do much to appease the anger of these brothers.

Jacob's sons were not content with such an offer, but they did see it as providing a means for their getting revenge: But Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor, with deceit, and spoke to them, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. Only on this condition will we consent to you; if you will become like us, in that every male of you be circumcised, then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you and become one people. But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go" (Genesis 34:13-17). Inter-marriage with the Canaanites is not only contrary to the purposes and promises of God in the Abrahamic covenant, but it is also a direct violation of the instructions which Isaac had given Jacob (Genesis 28:1-4).

On good faith, Hamor and Shechem went to their fellow citizens and convinced them to comply with the proposal of Jacob's sons and every male of Canaanites was circumcised (Genesis 34:18-24). However, Simeon and Levi didn't respect the agreement with Hamor as on the third day, when the Canaanite males were in pain, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers killed every male, Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword (Genesis 34:25-29). Jacob became very angry against his sons as he was afraid of the reactions of the Canaanites and the Perizzites (Genesis 34:30-31).

The Way Back (Genesis 35:1-29)

1. Back to Bethel (35:1-8)

In spite of his dramatic encounter with God in chapter 32, Jacob quickly lost any sense of urgency about doing what God had commanded. No doubt Jacob intended to get around to going up to Bethel in time, but there was no hurry in his mind. I have previously suggested that Jacob would have felt obliged to give the tithe that he had promised (28:22), which might have been a bitter pill to swallow. After promising to meet Esau at Seir (33:14), Jacob traveled the opposite direction, first to Succoth, then to Shechem. Jacob agreed to allow his children to inter-marry with the Canaanites in order to preserve peace and to enhance his prosperity (34:8ff.). Jacob seems to have little desire to do the will of God, which he knows. God had, after all, clearly spoken. The tragic and painful events of chapter 34 greatly improved Jacob's ability to hear and obey God. His daughter had been raped, his sons had put the men of Shechem to death, and it appeared that neither he nor his family could live safely in that region any longer. You see, while all of the men of the city of Shechem had been put to the sword, the women, children, and cattle had been taken as booty (34:28-29). The relatives of those who were killed and those taken captive were not inclined to take the actions of Jacob's sons lightly. Jacob was correct in his assessment of the danger of staying in that area (34:30). It was only at the point where Jacob sensed great danger and where it seemed impossible to stay in Shechem that Jacob was willing to listen to the voice of God reminding him of his duty to return to Bethel.

Jacob was to return to the place of his beginnings, spiritually speaking, and to dwell there. While oblivious to divine standards of holiness and purity in Succoth and Shechem, Jacob was intent upon putting off impurity before coming into the presence of God. Jacob had to be aware of the presence of the foreign gods in his camp. Further, he seemed to be content to do nothing about them until now. One reason may have been that Rachel, his favorite, had set the precedent when she took with her the household gods of her father (31:19). But here we are told that the possession of such “gods” was much more common in the camp of Jacob than by just Rachel. Part of the explanation for this is the fact that many foreigners had been added to Jacob’s household. While all of the men of Shechem had been put to the sword, the women and children were taken alive. These Canaanites undoubtedly kept their gods with them (or made new ones) when they were taken captive. Finally this idolatry had to be reckoned with. The foreign gods and also the earrings were collected and buried under the oak tree near Shechem. One cannot help but remark about Jacob’s casual attitude toward separation and purity while dwelling in Shechem. He tolerated the possession of foreign gods. He was about to enter into a relationship with the Canaanites, which would undermine the purity of this chosen race. But all of a sudden, when God called him to return to Bethel, he was greatly concerned about purity. Jacob knew that there could be no approach to God in an impure condition. Perhaps this explains, in part, his reluctance to “go up” to Bethel before now. Following our Lord has always been costly, and men should not do so without counting that cost (Luke 9:57-62). Many Christians are unwilling or hesitant to fully commit themselves to God for fear of what that commitment will cost them. There is a song which says, “... whatever it takes to be closer to Thee, Lord, that’s what I’ll be willing to do.” I doubt that many of us are willing to make that kind of commitment for fear of what might have to be set aside.

It was here at Bethel that Deborah, Rebecca’s maid, died. We are not told why or when she came to stay with Jacob. It is possible that she came bearing the news of Rebecca’s death and then stayed on with Jacob. No doubt Deborah was one to whom Jacob felt very attached, especially if he knew that his mother had died. Under the oak her body was buried.

2. God’s Blessing Reiterated (35:9-15)

Verse 9 is unusual in that it almost seems to overlook the time which lapsed between Jacob’s departure from Paddan-aram and his going up to Bethel. Thus, God’s appearance to Jacob “the second time” is recorded. Whenever the people of God choose to go their way, they must always return to the point where they departed from the revealed will of God. The blessings spoken by God are remarkably similar to those given to Abraham in Genesis 17:4-7. Jacob would be fruitful and would become a nation and a company of nations, and the land promised Abraham would be his and his descendants. The repetition of the change of Jacob’s name to Israel further assured him that the One he had seen face to face in chapter 32 was the same God who had twice revealed Himself to him at Bethel. The faith of Jacob must become the faith of his children.

3. Heartache in the Family (35:16-29)

Somewhere between Bethel and Bethlehem, Rachel went into hard labor. As the child was being born the midwife tried to encourage Rachel by informing her that it was the son she wanted so badly. We should recall that Joseph, the name she had given her first son, meant, literally, “add to me” (Genesis 30:24), expressing her desire for yet another son. With her dying breath Rachel named this second son Ben-oni, meaning “son of my sorrow.” Jacob would not allow that name to stand, however, and changed it to Benja-

min, “the son of my right hand.” Rachel was then buried on the way to Bethlehem, and Jacob and his household proceeded on, having set up a pillar along the way.

Jacob, Joseph, Jealousy, and a Journey to Egypt (Genesis 36:1 -37:36)

1. The Generations of Jacob and the Jealousy of His Sons (37:1-11)

In Genesis 37:2 Moses entitled this section “the records of the generations of Jacob.” This last section of Genesis, then, is an account of God’s working in the life of Jacob and of his sons through the instrumentality of Joseph. Joseph is certainly the central figure in these chapters, but he is not the only figure. God is forming a nation out of all the sons of Jacob. Joseph’s sojourn in Egypt and his ultimate elevation to the post of prime minister under Pharaoh makes possible the preservation of Jacob and his sons, as well as teaching all of them some valuable spiritual lessons. These verses recorded love of Jacob to Joseph, his dreams to overrule his brethren who will happen in the future, and how much his brethren were jealous of him. Several points can be concluded regarding the authority of Joseph; Joseph’s authority is not only permissible, but it is preferable, after the sin of Reuben, Joseph was given the rights of the firstborn, Joseph’s coat was a symbol of the authority he was granted over his brothers, the greatest antagonism toward Joseph was from the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah (verse 2), while the two brothers who attempted to release him (Reuben and Judah) were sons of Leah (37:21,26), Joseph’s report to his father would be a logical and necessary part of his function and authority as a supervisor, and the intensity of Joseph’s brothers’ reaction to his dreams indicates that there must have been some substance to their fears of Joseph assuming such great power and prominence.

2. An Evil Plot, An Empty Pit, and an Egyptian Purchase (37:12-36)

Jacob’s concern for the welfare of his family and his flocks was not unfounded. Shechem was the city where Dinah had been taken by force and where Jacob’s sons, especially Simeon and Levi (34:30), had slaughtered all of the men. Since Jacob had purchased land there (33:19), it would not be unusual for him to make use of it by sending his flocks there to feed on its rich pastureland under the care of his sons. But there was always the danger of some angry relative of one of those Shechemites who were killed or captured seeking vengeance. This seems to be what Joseph was sent to look into. Joseph wandered about the fields of Shechem in search of his brothers. It just so happened that a man found him who had further happened to see Joseph’s brothers and overhear them saying they were going on to Dothan. Not willing to give up his search and return to his father without completing his task, Joseph went on to Dothan. While at a considerable distance Joseph was recognized by his brothers. It was probably Joseph’s coat that made it possible to identify him so quickly from such a distance. It may also have been that coat which triggered the pent-up feelings of jealousy and hostility toward the beloved son of their father. They saw the great distance from their father and the remoteness of this spot as the ideal opportunity to do away with the threat which Joseph posed. The opportunity for a perfect alibi was also at hand, for wild animals were a threat to life and limb in the open field. They need not even produce a body if they blame Joseph’s absence on his being devoured by a wild beast. Only a bloody robe need be presented to Jacob. His imagination would take care of the rest.

Reuben had good reason to hate his brother, for it was Joseph who would obtain the birthright that could have belonged to him. But it seems that Reuben feared facing his father more than he hated Joseph. He was still the oldest of the family. Whether or not he had the rights of the first-born, he was still saddled with

the responsibilities. This may be the explanation for Reuben's suggestion and his intention to spare the life of Joseph. Reuben therefore suggests that they kill Joseph without the shedding of blood. Throw the boy in a cistern and let nature do him in. The idea had some definite advantages, and so the plan was agreed to. When Joseph arrived, his reception was far from friendly. They tore off his coat, the symbol of all that they rejected, and threw the defenseless young man into a pit. It is significant that this pit was empty, for normally it would have contained water. If this had been the case, Joseph would have drowned before the Ishmaelite caravan had arrived. Even the empty pit was a part of God's providential care of Joseph and his brothers. The callousness and cruelty of Joseph's brothers is almost unbelievable. Having thrown Joseph into the pit, they sat down to eat a meal. There is no loss of appetite, no sense of guilt or remorse. And there is no pity, for they eat their meal probably well within hearing of the cries that were continuing to come from the bottom of the pit. While they were eating, a caravan of Ishmaelites approached them on their way to Egypt from Gilead (verse 25). This gave Judah an idea which would prevent the shedding of Joseph's blood altogether. Rather than leaving Joseph to die of starvation and exposure, why not sell him into slavery to these traders? This would dispose of their problem, avoid the messy matter of murder, and get rid of any evidence of wrongdoing. Perhaps most appealing, it would provide them with a profit. In the end, Joseph was sold to the Midianite traders for twenty shekels of silver, the price which Moses later fixed for a young slave boy (Leviticus 27:5).

Not only were Joseph's brothers completely aloof to his suffering, but also they almost seemed to delight in the suffering that their report would bring to Jacob. There is no gentle approach, no careful preparation for the tragic news, only the crude act of sending the bloody coat to him and letting him draw the desired conclusion. It was a heartless deed, but one that accurately depicted their spiritual condition at the time. Jacob jumped to a conclusion, assuming the very worst had happened: Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him (Genesis 37:33-35). For many years Jacob would live with the lie that his son was dead. While Jacob was crying, "Woe is me," God was working all things together for the good of Jacob, Joseph, and his wayward brothers: "Meanwhile, the Midionites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard" (Genesis 37:36). Joseph, in fact, was not dead, nor was he outside of the providential care of God. By no accident Joseph ended up in the home of one of the most responsible officers of Pharaoh's administration. While years would pass by before God's purposes would become known, the process was under way.

The Skeleton in Judah's Closet (Genesis 38:1-30)

1. Judah's Family (38:1-11)

The sale of Joseph was only the "beginning of woes" for his father Israel. Directly on the heels of this sin flow the events of chapter 38. Unity among the sons of Israel was never a significant force. The selling of Joseph was only one indication of this, and even here, the brothers were not of one mind about it. But now Judah has chosen to leave his brothers and his father for "greener grass," namely fellowship and union with the Canaanites. Judah's troubles began with an association with Hirah, an Adullamite. The events of the chapter as a whole inform us that Hirah was a close friend and a very poor influence on Judah. Wherever Hirah is mentioned there is trouble in store for Judah. While with Hirah at Adullam, Judah saw a certain Canaanite woman whose name is never given. She is only referred to as "Shua's daughter" (verse 12, verse 2).

I take it from the fact that stress is laid on Judah's seeing this woman ("and Judah saw there," verse 2) that her outward appearance may have been his only consideration in taking her as a wife. Since this seems to have been influential in Jacob's selection of a wife, we need not be surprised at this. It was, then, a purely physical choice. Certainly no spiritual considerations were taken into account. Three sons were born from this union of Judah and the Canaanite woman: Er, Onan, and Shelah. For the first son, Tamar was acquired for a wife. Er, however, was so evil that God took his life. His sins are not detailed, for they are irrelevant to the point of the passage. Onan was then instructed by Judah to marry Tamar and raise up seed to his brother. Since the headship of the family (the birthright) normally went to the firstborn, this was a necessary act (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Onan knew that the offspring from his union with Tamar would only further the cause of his deceased brother rather than his own. Consequently he was not willing to have any children by her. To prevent Tamar from conceiving, Onan "spilled his seed on the ground" (verse 9). Such an act was regularly practiced, and God took the life of this man for his wickedness also.

Once Onan was dead, Judah became very reluctant to give his youngest (and last) son to Tamar. It never seemed to occur to him that it was his sons who were the problem, not Tamar. Probably Shelah was too young at first to assume the role of husband and father, but more than enough time elapsed to solve this problem. Finally Tamar was convinced that Judah had no intention of giving Shelah to her. If she were to bear children to carry on the name of her first husband, she must force the issue, she concluded.

2. Judah's Fornication (38:12-19)

After a considerable period of time two events occurred which set the scene for Judah to depart even further from the faith of his fathers. Already Judah had left his brothers and formed an alliance with Hirah. He had married a Canaanite and produced three children, two so wicked that God had to remove them. In time, Judah's Canaanite wife, whose name is never mentioned, passed away. Also, sufficient time had passed for Shelah to grow up and take Tamar as a wife to raise up children to Er, the eldest brother. But while Tamar was officially regarded as the wife of Shelah, the marriage was never consummated, for Judah had never given Shelah to Tamar. Judah, along with his unsavory companion Hirah, went up to Timnah to shear the sheep. News of this reached Tamar and signaled her to set into action a plan to provide a son to carry on the name of her first husband. In her society not only were the younger brothers able to raise up seed to her husband, but also her father-in-law, Judah. Since Judah was unwilling to risk the loss of his last and only living son, Tamar determined to force the matter, becoming pregnant by Judah. Judah was wrong in withholding Shelah, but so was Tamar by taking these matters into her own hands. She knew Judah very well, moral purity does not seem to be one of his virtues. There is little doubt that this wasn't Judah's first encounter with a prostitute. He does not evidence any of the naivety of one who is new at this sort of thing. He handled the arrangements like an experienced man of the world. Tamar was convinced that if she could only look like a prostitute, Judah would take things from there and that her purposes would be realized.

With all the *savoir-faire* of one who was worldly wise, Judah negotiated terms acceptable to both parties. It was probably common practice to ask for some kind of pledge since little could be done to force the "client" to pay after the fact. Judah was therefore not taken back by Tamar's insistence that some guarantee be given. Not that Tamar had any interest in payment. She wanted only to become pregnant by Judah. But the pledge that was given would serve to prove at a later time that Judah was the father of the child that was conceived from this union.

The seal, cord, and staff were not items purchased from mass-produced stock. Each had distinctive characteristics, which were peculiar to the owner. The seal was the ancient cylinder seal used in the making

of contracts. It was the counterpart of our Master Charge card today. The seal was a cylinder with the unique design of its owner carved in it. When a contract was made, hot wax was put on the document and the seal was rolled over it, leaving the impression of the owner of the seal. Judah's seal was one of a kind, as were those of others. He would therefore immediately recognize it as his own. The same was true of the staff. Possession of these gave Tamar proof of the identity of the father of her child when he was born.

3. Judah's Folly (38:20-26)

When this encounter ended Judah and Tamar went their separate ways. Judah never knew the identity of this "prostitute," and Tamar went back to her normal routine, living as a widow in her father's house. Normally such an affair would have been quickly forgotten, but several events occurred which made this immoral interlude a nightmare that Judah would never be able to put out of his mind. Hirah was sent to pay the prostitute and retrieve the pledge which Judah had given her, however, he didn't find her. Yet Judah was virtually aloof to these dangers. As one month, then two, and nearly three passed by without incident, the woman had not appeared again, nor was there any sign of his personal pledge. One day Judah was informed that Tamar was pregnant. This was not mere fornication, but it was adultery, for Tamar was pledged to marry Judah's third son, Shelah. Judah's righteous indignation must have been awesome. She must be burned! This was an unusually severe punishment, even more than the Law required. The usual punishment prescribed by the Law of Moses was stoning (Deuteronomy 22:20-24). In cases of unusual wickedness, there was punishment by burning (Leviticus 20:14; 21:9). Why, then, was Judah demanding such treatment for his daughter-in-law? It may have been a sub-conscious overcompensation for his own immorality. Often we attempt to cover up our own sinfulness by a severity in our response to the sins of others. Tamar's response to the situation was incredibly subdued and submissive. She, it would seem, privately presented the evidence to Judah and politely urged him to carefully consider it. She made no condemning accusations but only submitted the seal, the cord, and the staff to Judah. Judah, the forefather of the Messiah and the great grandson of Abraham, had to say of this woman, "She is more righteous than I" (verse 26). Judah may have had some kind of turnaround here, for he did not again have any physical relations with Tamar. Also, the next time we read of him he is again back with his brothers and father. Some kind of spiritual renewal must have taken place.

4. Jesus' Family (38:27-30)

The closing paragraph of the chapter describes the birth of the twins that resulted from the union of Judah and Tamar. Since the twin that was first to emerge from the womb traditionally possessed the rights of the firstborn, some kind of identifying mark was placed on the first to issue from the womb. When one of the boys thrust out a hand, a scarlet thread was tied about it, assuming that he would shortly come forth. The hand was withdrawn, however, and the firstborn was the other boy. This firstborn was named Perez, while the next son, the one with the scarlet thread, was named Zero. As later genealogies will prove, this firstborn son, Perez, was to be the son of Judah who would carry on the messianic line until the time of David, and ultimately, of Jesus (Ruth 4:12; Matthew 1:3).

From the Penthouse to the Prison (Genesis 39:1-23)

1. The Results of Righteousness—Promotion and Prison (39:1-18)

From these first six verses we can determine a sequence of events which culminated in Joseph's promotion to the second highest position of power in Potiphar's household. Joseph was a shepherd, so it

would have been natural for him to begin his “career” in the fields of Potiphar. His success would first have been observed by his master there. Good reports reached the ears of Potiphar, who then brought him into his house (verse 2). Now, under the watchful eye of his master, the administrative skills of this Hebrew shepherd boy were even more apparent. Potiphar not only observed that Joseph was a valuable employee, but also he discerned that his effectiveness was due to his relationship with his God (verse 3). Joseph had to have revealed his Hebrew origins from the beginning (also verse 14), as well as his own faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. While he could have taken all of the credit for his unusual abilities, Joseph gave the glory to God. I do not think that Potiphar discerned this from his religious sensitivity but from Joseph’s clear and consistent testimony. While no one would have ever guessed that Judah was blessed of God (chapter 38), Joseph’s life was one that brought glory to God. Obedience and purity give glory to God in a way that disobedience and immorality cannot. Potiphar was wise enough to recognize the extraordinary ability of Joseph. Under his supervision more and more authority was given to this Hebrew. Not only did God bless the areas over which Joseph was given authority, but also Potiphar was blessed in proportion to the authority he gave Joseph. Eventually, Potiphar made Joseph his administrative assistant and gave him full charge over every facet of his enterprise. Potiphar was wise enough to stay out of Joseph’s way and let him handle virtually everything, save the food, which he ate, and the woman he had taken as his wife.

Jacob was a physically attractive young man. Interestingly, the same description of Joseph is used with reference to his mother also (29:17). But his good looks were not the only reason why he caught the eye of Potiphar’s wife. It was “after these events” (verse 7), namely Joseph’s rise to power and position, that the physical attractiveness of Joseph registered with this woman. There is little chance that she would have had any interest in a slave, a mere hired hand. But a man who had great leadership abilities and good looks—well, that was something else. The text indicates that it was over a period of some time that this woman came to the conclusion she must have him. Joseph probably had his “office” inside the house of Potiphar. He now had the authority to come and go wherever and whenever he pleased. He had constant and ready access to the house of Potiphar. It was inevitable that contact with Potiphar’s wife would be more frequent and under more private conditions. More and more, this woman began to capitalize on this. Finally, she brazenly propositioned him (verse 7). From then on she hounded him, probably engineering opportunities to entice him and persistently trying to break down his resistance. The temptation of Joseph is strikingly parallel to the test of Adam and Eve in the garden. They had free use of everything in the garden, save the fruit of one tree. So Joseph had access to anything of Potiphar’s except his wife. But while the forbidden fruit just hung there tempting Adam and Eve, Potiphar’s wife actively pursued Joseph.

Joseph dealt with this persistent pursuit in three stages. First, he endeavored to reason with the woman. He explained to her that he had come to a position not only of power, but also of privilege and trust. To possess his master’s wife and satisfy his own personal desires was to violate the sacred trust, which was committed to him. Furthermore, she was a married woman, and as such their relationship would be adulterous. For both of these reasons the act which Potiphar’s wife proposed was one that would be a great sin against God. But Potiphar’s wife was in no reasonable mood. She cared little for Joseph’s logic, and so Joseph had to continually resist her advances. Even her requests which sought to bring the two in closer contact were refused. It appears that at times she appealed to him only to be near her, but Joseph knew all too well that she wanted more, and even this would be inappropriate. He was not responsible to meet either her emotional or physical needs, which were the concern only of her husband. Finally, Joseph had to run from her. Day after day she sought to break down his defenses. In fact, she may have been spurred on by his resistance, for this made him even more of a challenge. Always before there had been someone about, it seems, but at last they were alone, hardly an accident I would think. At least there were no men about (verse 11). I

doubt that anyone who worked as a domestic in Potiphar's house was ignorant of their mistress' intentions toward Joseph. It does not appear that she cared whether they knew or not, for she daily hounded him. But when they were alone, she must have thought that Joseph would now be persuaded. Was he not resisting because he was afraid of the consequences of being caught? Who would know now? And so she boldly grasped him by his garment and pled with him.

This was no time to reason with the woman. It was not a time to "pray about it" or to meditate. The only godly course of action was to flee from her. This Joseph did by slipping out of his garment and leaving it in her grasp. Hurriedly, Joseph went outside where one would suppose there were others about and no further advances could be made. As is often the case, the passion of love can quickly turn to hate (II Samuel 13:15). The garment left behind by Joseph was still in the hands of Potiphar's wife, who hastily devised a plan to make him regret his resistance. Calling the men of the household, whose absence had precipitated her final pass at Joseph, she accused him of attempting to rape her. Not only did she appeal to the emotional reaction that such a crime would bring, but she also highlighted the fact that this "attack" was by a detested foreigner, a Hebrew (verse 14, 43:32; 46:34). Because no one had been about, she could claim to have screamed, which no one could have heard from such a distance. This explains why the "attack" occurred with no apparent cries for help. The scream she falsely reported did explain the garment of Joseph in her hands, however, for she alleged that when she cried out it frightened Joseph so that he left his garment and fled.

Potiphar's response was predictable. A slave, a Hebrew slave no less, had attempted to violate his wife. Naturally Potiphar was angered beyond words. Joseph is not said to have been questioned, but even if he were, the truth would be harder to bear than the accusation against this slave. If not touched with some sense of compassion, it must at least have troubled Potiphar to have to imprison such a valuable employee, for much of what he possessed was the result of Joseph's service. Certainly, Potiphar's punishment of Joseph is not nearly as severe as we would have expected. As "captain of the palaceguard" (verse 1), he must have had authority to execute criminals. Such a crime as rape, attempted by a foreigner, must have been considered worthy of death. Instead, Potiphar cast him into "the" prison, the place where political prisoners were confined (verse 20).

How to Get Out of the Pits (Genesis 40:1-23)

1. A Divine Appointment (40:1-8)

Two of Pharaoh's officers had committed unknown offenses which greatly angered their master and resulted in their imprisonment (verses 1, 2). One was the king's cupbearer, whom we shall call the butler; the other was the chief baker. These offenses were not mere indiscretions, but some clear-cut act of disobedience or misconduct, as the original term indicates. These two officers, now fallen from the favor of Pharaoh, were placed under Joseph's authority in the prison where he, too, was held in bonds. After some time had passed, both the butler and the baker had a dream on the same night. The dream of each man was distinct and the meaning different (verse 5). We are told that Egyptians believed that dreams were indicative of future events, and so these two were most concerned by the fact that here, in the dungeon, there was no one qualified to interpret their dreams for them. Their futures had been revealed to them in their dreams, but they could not be interpreted, and the realization of this brought great distress to them. Their downcast faces reflected their great dismay. Each had a dream, they reported, but no one was there who was able to give them the meaning.

With a confidence too contagious to resist, Joseph reminded his companions that the interpretations of dreams belong to God. Since this was the case, they need only tell their dreams to Joseph. He, and they, expected an interpretation of the dreams of the previous night. Joseph's absolute confidence informs us of his spiritual condition. A man in his circumstances might well question whether or not there even was a God. Many Christians, like the friends of Job, would wonder if his imprisonment were not the result of sin. Joseph was assured of God's love and care. His eagerness to hear and interpret these dreams reveals his confidence of God's love and care in his life. The eagerness of the butler to relate his dream to Joseph indicates that he, too, sensed God's closeness to this Hebrew.

2. The Good News and the Bad News (40:9-19)

The butler's dream corresponded closely with his previous position under Pharaoh. The dream must therefore indicate what the future held for him, especially in regard to being the cupbearer of Pharaoh. The vine before him, having three branches, rapidly budded, blossomed, and produced grapes, which he squeezed into the cup of Pharaoh and then put into his hands, just as he had formerly done. The three branches signified three days, Joseph told the butler. The dream foretold the restoration of the butler to his former position. In three days things would return to the way they had been previously. Joseph did request that he be remembered before Pharaoh (verse 14), for the circumstances which led to his arrival in Egypt, as well as those which brought him to prison, were a matter of injustice which Pharaoh could correct. Joseph's one request of the butler gave further testimony to the great faith of this Hebrew prisoner.

The baker's dream also corresponded with his previous position under Pharaoh. He was a baker, and so his dream centered about three baskets filled with bread, just as the butler saw a vine with three branches. In both cases the number "three" pertained to the number of days until the fulfillment of the dreams. But here the similarities end dramatically. The bad news for the baker was that in three days' time he would have his head lifted off, not lifted up. He was to be hanged, and his body left for the birds to feast upon. It was a horrible prophecy, and Joseph naturally did not ask this man for any favors in the future.

3. Prophecies Fulfilled, But Promises Forgotten (40:20-23)

The third day happened to be Pharaoh's birthday., the butler is given his former post, while the baker is taken out and hanged. But the butler forgot all about Joseph for two years. Perhaps at first the butler intended to keep his promise to Joseph but never found the right moment to mention the injustice done to Joseph. As the days went by, thoughts of Joseph's sufferings were suppressed, along with all the other painful memories triggered by any recollection of that prison. Finally, Joseph was completely forgotten until the king, too, had a dream, which could not be interpreted.

From the Pit to the Palace (Genesis 41:1-57)

1. Pharaoh's Revelation and Joseph's Release (41:1-13)

Two full years had passed, and Joseph is still confined in Potiphar's prison, forgotten by the cupbearer of the Pharaoh despite Joseph's favorable interpretation and plea to be remembered after his predictions came to pass (40:14-15). God chose to work through means other than human instruments, and thus He spoke to Pharaoh in two dramatic dreams. "From the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. Then, behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and

gaunt, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears". Both dreams were very real and most disturbing. After each, Pharaoh was awakened (41:4,7). The dream was distressing to the Pharaoh because it was twice experienced in varying forms, interrupted by his being awakened. The king's usual source of information, the magicians, was totally baffled, as was Pharaoh. The king's frustration at having such impressive dreams and yet being unable to know their meaning was too similar to the experience of the cupbearer to be overlooked. Joseph was finally brought to the cupbearer's mind, and Pharaoh was told of the unusual Hebrew slave with whom this official had "spent time" (Genesis 41:9-13).

2. Pharaoh's Problem and Joseph's Plan (41:14-36)

Joseph was hurriedly brought out of Potiphar's dungeon, but he did not face Pharaoh until he had shaved and changed his clothes. This was not just "cleaning up," which surely was needed; it was a cultural concession. To the Hebrews, a beard was a mark of dignity (II Samuel 10:4-5; Ezra 9:3), but for the Egyptian it was an offensive thing. When Joseph came before Pharaoh, the distressing dreams of the previous night were immediately brought up. Pharaoh had heard that Joseph could interpret them. Joseph's first concern was not with his own comfort, but with God's glory. The ability to interpret dreams, which Pharaoh had credited to Joseph, was not his at all. Only God can interpret dreams, Joseph quickly corrected. The young Hebrew slave's words not only clarified the source of his ability, but they also seemed to give Pharaoh hope that the outcome of Joseph's ministry to him would bring him comfort in his distress (verse 16). With these words, Pharaoh eagerly repeated his dreams to Joseph, closing by confessing the inability of his most able counselors to give him any word of explanation (verse 24).

Joseph skillfully interpreted the two dreams. The two dreams, while different in some details, were one in their meaning (verse 25). Both dreams were given in order to indicate the certainty of what was to occur (verse 32). In each instance "seven" was the time involved—seven years. The fat cows and the plump heads of grain were indicative of the seven years of abundance which were to commence soon in Egypt. The seven gaunt cows and the seven scorched and withered heads of grain foretold the famine, which was to follow the years of plenty. The bottom line was that Egypt was to have seven years of plenty followed by a famine so severe that all of the previous abundance would be consumed. A capable administrator was required. He should be instructed to take command of the situation and to gather up a double portion of the bumper crops that would be produced by the land in the years of prosperity. Under him, men should be appointed to make collections and supervise the storage of the land's produce. These surpluses should be brought into the cities for safe-keeping and later distribution. By these means the effects of the famine could be minimized. I have become more convinced than ever, having gained a deeper appreciation for the character and humble spirit of Joseph, that it never entered into his mind that he should be the one appointed over this project. Self-interest had never been manifest in his character or conduct prior to this. He did not even mention his unjust imprisonment. Furthermore, who could ever have conceived of a Hebrew slave being elevated to the second highest office in the land? Regardless of the person in charge, the plan would have to be followed in order to deal with the famine, which was predicted.

3. A Promotion by Pharaoh (41:37-45)

While there was a certain amount of relief resulting from Joseph's interpretation, the greatest comfort came from his proposed plan of action and the evidence of his competence to oversee the matter. Joseph was the man for the job. Pharaoh's statement gave testimony to his conviction that Joseph had divine enablement. Tokens of his new authority were the signet ring, fine garments, a gold necklace, and the royal chariot, preceded by those who proclaimed the fame and position of Joseph (verses 42, 43). Pharaoh took two other highly symbolic actions, which helped to cement Joseph's new position with the people of the land. First, Joseph was given an Egyptian name. This is further confirmed by the gift of an Egyptian wife, Asenath (verse 45).

4. A Program Implemented (41:46-57)

The final section serves several purposes. First, it reveals the accuracy of Joseph's interpretation. Second, it evidences the administrative astuteness of Joseph in handling the affairs of state in preparation for the famine to come. Finally, it reveals to us Joseph's continued spiritual commitment to the God of his fathers. Just as Joseph had indicated, the next seven years were marked by great abundance. The land produced in such quantity that the grain held in reserve for the future was beyond measure (verse 49). Joseph skillfully carried out the plan which he had proposed to Pharaoh, storing up a fifth of the grain in the cities for later use. At the end of the seven years of plenty, the famine hit Egypt with severity. The people came to Pharaoh requesting bread, and he sent them to Joseph, telling them to do whatever he said (verse 55). Joseph opened the storehouses and began to sell grain to the Egyptians and to those from other lands, some of whom would be his own brothers. During the years of Egypt's great prosperity Joseph was blessed with two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. The names which they were given give us further indication of Joseph's spiritual condition during these exhilarating years in Pharaoh's palace. Manasseh, which means "making to forget", was Joseph's expression of his gratitude toward God, Who had enabled him to forget "all my trouble and all my father's household" (verse 51). The name Ephraim, that is "fruitfulness", conveyed the assurance of Joseph that it was God who had given him prosperity and blessing in the land of his affliction. To Joseph, affliction and blessing were not contradictory, for God was able to turn sorrow into joy.

The Proper Use of Power (Genesis 42:1-38)

1. Reunion (42:1-7)

While the famine was said to be world-wide (41:57), it was particularly intended to be the cause of Jacob's family going down into Egypt where they would remain for more than 400 years. The events of chapter 42 are thus the occasion for the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. The scene in Canaan is almost amusing. The brothers of Joseph stand in the presence of their father, deeply distressed by the fact that their food supply is nearly depleted, and there is no hope of replenishing it so long as the famine persists. Jacob, aware of the availability of grain in Egypt, prodded his sons into action with the rebuke, "Don't just stand there, go down to Egypt and get some grain." Jacob's partiality toward the sons of Rachel is still very obvious. While the other ten sons were sent to Egypt, Benjamin was kept near, under the watchful eye of his father (verse 4). It could not have been because Benjamin was too young, for he had to have been in his twenties by now. At the age of 17 Joseph had been sent a considerable distance from home to check on his brothers (37:2,12). Perhaps the circumstances of Joseph's disappearance were too suspect for Jacob to take another chance by leaving Benjamin in the care of his other brothers. The ten brothers arrived in Egypt along with many others to buy grain from Joseph. Without realizing they were fulfilling the prophecy of Jo-

seph's two dreams years before (37:6-11), his brothers bowed low before him, expressing the respect due to one of such high office. How tempting for Joseph to ask them to bow just a little lower or perhaps to do so just one more time. How easy it would have been to bask in the honor and power which was now his. But all we are told is that Joseph recognized these men as his brothers, yet his identity was not known to them. More than twenty years, along with a clean-shaven face, Egyptian clothing, customs, and language, precluded any thought that this potentate might be their brother. He had, after all, been sold as a slave. From verse 7 alone we might be inclined to think that Joseph was being harsh with his brothers out of a spirit of vengeance. Certainly this would be the normal reaction of anyone as mistreated as Joseph had been by his brothers. His severity, however, was a "disguise" (verse 7), an effort to keep his identity a secret. So, Joseph's brothers couldn't know his identity.

2. Confrontation (42:8-17)

But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. And Joseph remembered the dreams, which he had about them, and said to them, "You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land" (Genesis 42:8-9). Joseph not only realized the fulfillment of his dreams but also the reason for them. He saw that God had a purpose for placing him in his position of power, and this purpose was for him to function as the family head, protecting and preserving his family. But they said, "Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no more" (Genesis 42:9-13). Joseph's severity was feigned, not real. He needed to learn more information without his brothers realizing whom he was or what he was attempting to accomplish. His harshness was intended to produce fear, for at this point in the lives of his brothers fear produced more facts than faith. In their fear they blurted out the things which Joseph yearned to know. Was his father alive? And how was Benjamin? Disclosing the disappearance of one brother and the existence of another in Canaan provided Joseph with the opportunity to test his brothers in the area of their greatest failure. And Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies; by this you will be tested; by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! Send one of you that he may get your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." So he put them all together in prison for three days (Genesis 42:14-17). Joseph narrowed the situation down to two options: either they had come as spies, in which case their story about a younger brother was a mere fabrication, or they were telling the truth. The matter could easily be settled by their producing the younger brother. All of the brothers would be detained except one, who could be dispatched to bring back the proof of their honesty. How cleverly Joseph handled this situation to bring about his desired ends without his brothers seeing his purpose in it all. Joseph then placed all of the brothers in confinement.

3. Diminished Demands (42:18-24)

The outcome of Joseph's dealings with his brothers was considerably less harsh than what was first threatened. He had first maintained that all of the brothers would be held captive while only one was to be sent for Benjamin (verse 16). But now he has reduced his demands considerably. Now Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die." And they did so. Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us." And Reuben

answered them, saying, “Did I not tell you, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood.” They did not know, however, that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. And he turned away from them and wept. But when he returned to them and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes (Genesis 42:18-24).

4. Payment Returned (42:25-28)

It was time for his brothers to return home, for their families were soon to run out of grain. Orders were given to fill his brothers’ bags with grain and to return their payment, but to conceal it within their bags. Probably to ensure that they would not discover the money until it was too late to turn back, provisions were made to meet their needs on the journey home. Inadvertently, one of the brothers opened his large sack to feed his donkey and discovered his money returned. The brothers’ response was, in my estimation, a sign of positive growth. Evil men would have laughed at the stupidity of the servant who must have misplaced the payment and would have enjoyed having put one over on the Egyptians. Yet these men were distraught, for they saw that this was the hand of God, not fate, and that this might be discovered back in Pharaoh palace where their brother Simeon was being held prisoner. They knew that they had promised to return with Benjamin. If this missing money was made known to Joseph, things might not go so well for them on their next visit. It never seemed to occur to the other eight brothers that their money would be found in their sacks too (verse 35).

Initially I thought that Joseph’s motive for returning their money was in order to test them—a test of their honesty. But why, then, would the smaller provision sacks have been prepared in order to keep the sacks with the money from being opened? Did he wish to see if they would make restitution on their next trip? Perhaps so, for they did sell him into bondage for money (37:25-28). Frankly, I do not think Joseph intended this as a test, though it proved to be so. I believe that he had no intention of selling anything to his brothers, but rather of supplying their needs freely. This would then be an illustration of the principle taught in Proverbs: If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink (Proverbs 25:21).

5. Jacob’s Sons Return and Report (42:29-38)

Upon their arrival the brothers had quite a story to tell. Simeon had been taken as a captive until they can bring Benjamin along on the next trip if they expected to see Simeon again or to purchase more grain (verse 34). Now it came about as they were emptying their sacks, that behold, every man’s bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. And their father Jacob said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin; all these things are against me.” Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, “You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my care, and I will return him to you.” But Jacob said, “My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow” (Genesis 42:35-38).

I find it interesting to compare the response of Joseph’s brothers to the discovery of the money in the one sack along the way (verses 27-28) with that of Jacob here. There the hand of God was seen. Here nothing is said of God, but only of bad luck and of personal disaster for Jacob. In these chapters dealing with the life of Joseph, three different responses to adversity are seen. For Joseph, his suffering was ultimately from the hand of a loving heavenly Father, Who was near in his affliction (cf. 39:23, 21-23; 40:8;

41:16,51-52). For his brothers, their adversity was punishment from an angry God, Who was getting even with them for their sin (42:21-22, 28). For Jacob, it was no more than the fickle hand of fate or, worse yet, the stupidity of his sons, that made his life miserable (42:36-38). And yet in every instance affliction was the gentle and gracious hand of God, drawing His sons closer to Himself. Jacob was in a far different spiritual state than his son Joseph. How self-centered Jacob's words are. "Poor me!" That is the essence of them. He could not see the gentle hand of God in all of this, but it was there regardless. While affliction drew Joseph ever closer to God, Jacob had seemingly forgotten his faith. A further indication of the breakdown in Jacob's spiritual life was his reaction to the necessity of sending Benjamin to Egypt. Reuben sought to assure Jacob that things would work out all right. Jacob was not to be convinced. Indeed, he was not willing to even take a chance on losing Benjamin. In effect, this meant that Jacob was willing to sacrifice his son Simeon rather than run any risk of losing his favored son Benjamin. Partiality was still very much a part of Jacob's nature.

The Fears of Jacob and the Tears of Joseph (Genesis 43:1-34)

1. Jacob and Judah (43:1-15)

Now the famine was severe in the land. So it came about when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, "Go back, buy us a little food". Judah spoke to him, however, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. But if you do not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you'" (Genesis 43:1-5).

Jacob was shaken by the stand, which his sons took, but he was not willing to succumb to their demands, that easily. The next verses display a further attempt to deny reality and to defer sending Benjamin to Egypt. Then Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly by telling the man whether you still had another brother?" But they said, "The man questioned particularly about us and our relatives, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' So we answered his questions. Could we possibly know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'" (Genesis 43:6-7).

While Reuben's efforts to persuade his father to let Benjamin return to Egypt with the others had been resisted, Judah begins to emerge as a leader in the family. His words encourage Jacob to make that painful decision to let Benjamin go: And Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever. For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice" (Genesis 43:8-10). Reuben promised to assume full responsibility for the safety of Benjamin and offered his own two sons if he were to fail (Genesis 42:37). Judah's offer is once more forcefully made. He urged his father to stop thinking of himself and to act in accordance with his responsibility for the entire clan. While Jacob spoke only of "I," "me," and "my," Judah thought in terms of "we," "us," and "our" (contrast 42:36,38 with 43:8). Judah seems to speak for all his brothers in refusing to go again to Egypt without Benjamin. He also rebukes Jacob for his needless delay in sending Benjamin to Egypt. Whereas Reuben offered only his sons in return for his failure, Judah offers himself as the guarantee of a successful mission (verse 9).

The verses, which follow, indicate that Jacob is only passively and reluctantly surrendering to his circumstances. His leadership at this time lacks any sign of spiritual maturity or great faith. Then their father Is-

rael said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some of the best products of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man as a present, a little balm and a little honey, aromatic gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. And take double the money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake” (Genesis 43:11-12). Jacob’s first thought is to “sweeten the pot” with a few of the choicest products of the land of Canaan. In addition to bringing these gifts, Jacob instructed his sons to take both the money they had found in their sacks and the additional money needed to buy a new supply of grain, and they were to give this double amount to the governor. Perhaps the money was misplaced in their sacks and their returning it would be further evidence of their honesty. Finally, Jacob gave Benjamin into the care of his sons and his God. “Take your brother also, and arise, return to the man; and may God Almighty grant you compassion in the sight of the man, that he may release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” So the men took this present, and they took double the money in their hand, and Benjamin; then they arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph (Genesis 43:13-15).

Taken as a whole, we can suggest the principles, which seemed to have governed Jacob’s actions at this time in his life. I do not recommend them to anyone, but at least we shall spell them out in order to stimulate a re-appraisal of our own leadership.

2. Jacob’s Seven Laws of Leadership

(1) Whatever problems arise today are best dealt with tomorrow. Jacob delayed acting decisively on the issue of sending Benjamin to Egypt until the situation reached crisis proportions. Given enough time anything could happen, Jacob reasoned, and he was willing to wait indefinitely on this slim hope.

(2) No problem can possibly be as bad as it seems. This second one is the effort to minimize the problem to the point that it hardly seems worth giving time to its solution. If the problem is not serious, then it can be put off indefinitely.

(3) Honesty is not the best policy. Jacob still had a lot of the old deceiver in him. He believed that good communication only causes problems. He thought that the less others knew about him, the better off he and his family were. Judah was thus rebuked for telling Joseph any facts about the family. Many Christians today operate on this same principle. They think that keeping others from knowing them well avoids problems, but they, like Jacob, are desperately misled. Sin loves secrecy and darkness, while righteousness loves the light (John 3:19-21).

(4) Always look out for number one. Jacob’s leadership was consistently exercised in the light of his own personal interests. It was Judah who urged his father to think of others rather than himself (verse 3). No leader is harder to follow than the one who seeks only his own interests. Conversely, no leader is easier to follow than the one who seeks the best interests of those he leads (Ephesians 5:22.).

(5) As much as is possible, see to it that others receive the blame for any problems. Jacob sought to place the responsibility on Judah and his brothers because they told the truth (verse 6). A good leader is one who is willing to accept the responsibility for his mistakes.

(6) If our efforts to solve a problem fail, add money. Jacob hoped that his presents, along with double payment, would help achieve his desired ends. Christians are often accused of being the last to reach for their wallets. Whether this is true or not, we are all tempted to resort to monetary solutions to our prob-

lems. We may pay our children for behaving as they should or offer to pay whatever it takes to solve their problems. Money seldom solves problems, while it causes many.

(7) When all else fails, trust God. It is no accident that Jacob mentions God last. It never seemed to occur to him as it did to Joseph that God was active in all of his troubles. His wish that God would be with his sons is only a last ditch effort when it should have been his first line of defense.

3. Joseph's Brothers—Fears and Futile Efforts (43:16-25)

Joseph's brothers came with a plan of action previously outlined by their father. They would offer the Egyptian governor a gift of some of Canaan's best products (verse 11), and they would give back the money, which had been returned in their sacks (verse 12). As events began to develop on their return to Joseph in Egypt, the situation seemed even more foreboding, and these two strategies were now pursued with desperate diligence.

When Joseph looked out and beheld Benjamin with his older brothers, he set a plan in motion, apparently without talking to them. He instructed his servant to take these men into his house and to prepare a meal for them in a way that parallels the reception of the prodigal son in the New Testament (Luke 15:11-32). Unaware that they were being taken into Joseph's home to partake of the noon meal, they thought it was they who were destined for slaughter. In desperation they took the steward aside to explain how they had found their money in their sacks and that they had brought it with them to repay it. The steward sought to calm their fears by assuring them that he had received the money for their grain. Indeed he had, but he did not mention to them that it was he, under Joseph's orders, who also returned it. In keeping with later biblical instruction on giving (Matthew 6:2-4), the steward informed these men that it was their God and the God of their father who had provided this money (verse 23). To further assure them, he brought out Simeon and returned him to them. By this time the men had learned that the reason for their being brought to Joseph's home was to partake in the noon meal with him (verse 25). Anticipating Joseph's arrival, they first were given water to drink and freshen up and fodder to feed their animals. After this, they set themselves to the task of preparing the gift, which they would present to Joseph when he arrived (verse 25).

4. Joseph's Brotherly Love (43:26-34)

What a contrast we find between the fears of Jacob and his sons in the previous verses and the tears of Joseph in this last section. Joseph's deep love for his brothers is, of course, not yet evident to them, but it is made known to us. It makes the fears of previous verses look as foolish as they really are. To Joseph's brothers nothing was more important than those pistachio nuts and almonds. These nuts, along with the other products of the land of Canaan, were expected to win Joseph's favor. He never gave them a glance. He did not ask how they were grown or what year they were produced. He didn't care. Joseph was only concerned with people, not pistachio nuts; he cared about his brother Benjamin, his father Jacob, and the rest of his brethren. His first utterance sought information on the health of his aged father (verse 27). Next he turned his attention to Benjamin, who he had not seen for over twenty years. Joseph pronounced upon Benjamin a blessing which should have sounded strange coming from an Egyptian (Genesis 33:5,11; Numbers 6:25; Psalm 67:1). Seeing the only other son of his mother was too much for Joseph to contain. Quickly he left the presence of his brothers to weep and to regain control of his emotions (verse 30). After regaining his composure and washing his face, Joseph returned and ordered the meal to be served. In complete harmony with the Egyptian culture (and to continue concealing his identity), Joseph ate at one table, his Egyptian servants at another, and his brothers at still another table, somewhat separate, yet in front of him. A situation similar to

that, which existed between Jews and Gentiles in the New Testament period, must have dictated this separation. Most puzzling of all, Joseph had arranged for his brothers to be seated in the order of their ages, from the oldest to the youngest. While all of his brothers were well fed, Benjamin received a portion that was five times greater than his brothers. The seating arrangement did not pass Joseph's brothers by without notice, and they were amazed at how this could be done. While it did not suggest to them that Joseph was their brother, it did convince them that this man had a knowledge and insight that was far from normal. He possessed a power greater than others (cf. 44:15).

I have always felt that the preferential treatment of Benjamin was a part of Joseph's plan to test his brothers, but I am less impressed by this view after studying this chapter. I do believe that giving Benjamin five times as much as any of his brothers served to remind the rest of his preferential status (mainly from his father, but even from Joseph). It did provide the setting for the test of Joseph's brothers in chapter 44, for they were now given the opportunity to do away with Benjamin, with no real blame to themselves. While Joseph's generosity to Benjamin served to highlight the fact that he was now, in place of Joseph, the favored son, I don't believe this was Joseph's reason for his actions at the table. This, like the return of the money to his brothers, was motivated by genuine love and benevolence. Joseph did have a more intimate relationship with Benjamin, and he did not hesitate to reveal it. This act provided more food for thought for his brothers to digest. I do not in any way see this multiplied portion as anything sadistically or improperly motivated. I view it as an indication of Joseph's deep love for his brother. The kindness, which Joseph showed to his brothers in chapter 43, was with no hidden or ulterior motives, but only to bestow blessing upon them. The test of chapter 44 is seen to be necessary in the light of their departure, yet without fully revealing their character. The blessings at Joseph's disposal were to be poured out on men who had shown genuine repentance. That repentance would become evident in the test which was to follow.

The Final Test: Dothan Relived (Genesis 44:1-34)

1. Arrest (44:1-13)

The noon meal finally finished, Joseph instructed his steward to provide his brothers with as many provisions as they could carry. As he did on the first journey to Egypt, Joseph ordered his steward to place in their sacks the money they had given for their grain. In addition to this, the silver cup, which belonged to Joseph, was placed in the sack of Benjamin, thus setting the scene for the final test of his brothers. Joseph's brothers must have spent the night at his house, for they were "sent off" at first light (verse 3). No more had they gotten out of sight than Joseph ordered his steward to pursue them, charging them with theft and bringing back Benjamin, in whose sack the silver cup was sure to be found. The instructions which Joseph gave are cited as a quotation, but surely more detailed orders were given, for what happens is much more complex than what Joseph commanded his steward. A serious difficulty arises with this silver cup that is hidden in Benjamin's sack. The servant described it as the cup, which his master used for divination (verse 5). And in verse 15 Joseph claimed to have knowledge through divination. The difficulty lies in the fact that later revelation strictly forbids divination: You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor practice divination or soothsaying (Leviticus 19:26). How could one as spiritual as Joseph be guilty of using a method of gaining knowledge that was an abomination to God? The explanation of it was just one more element of the carefully constructed disguise of Joseph, who posed as a true Egyptian. Such a godly man as he is unlikely to have employed methods, which God would later condemn. Some of the commandments of the Mosaic Law, while recorded later, were known and observed in much earlier times, such as the law of levirate marriage (Genesis 38:8; Deuteronomy 25:5-6). When speaking to his steward Joseph referred to this cup differently than we

would expect: “And put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest . . .” (Genesis 44:2). Joseph referred to his cup in this way because it reflected the actual use of that cup in such a way as to distinguish it (for his steward’s sake) from any other cup. He wanted a particular cup placed in Benjamin’s sack, and so he distinguished it by its uniqueness; it was Joseph’s cup—his drinking cup—which was silver. This also explains why Joseph gave very specific instructions to his steward as to how he should refer to this cup when accusing his brothers of theft: “Is not this the one from which my lord drinks, and which he indeed uses for divination?” (Genesis 44:5).

Joseph’s faithful steward now set out to accomplish what his master commanded. Overtaking these Hebrew men as they headed back to their father, the steward accused them of stealing the silver “divining” cup. With smug confidence and self-righteousness the brothers assured the steward that such a thing was beyond them. After all, had they not attempted to return the money, which they found in their sacks from the first journey? If they would not keep money that was accidentally placed in their sacks, much less would they consider taking as common thieves what was not theirs. Assured of their innocence, they overcompensated by pronouncing their own sentence if found guilty: let the thief, if indeed there was one, be put to death, and let all the rest become slaves. Slavery was what these men had most feared (43:18), and yet they were willing to risk it because they were certain of their innocence. Knowing that he would discover the cup and probably knowing the intent of his master in this situation to test them in the matter of family cohesiveness and loyalty, the steward wisely and graciously modified their self-imposed sentence: no, let the one in whose sack the cup is found become Joseph’s slave and all the rest go free.

Each man hastened to take down his sack and open it, for they were certain that their innocence would be proven. While nothing is said of the gold which was placed in each man’s sack (verse 1), the discovery of this money in each of their sacks must have made their hearts sink just as it had before (42:28, 35). Their logic had been, “How could they think of stealing his silver cup if they would not take his money?” And yet for some unknown reason they did have his money. A growing sense of dread must have come over these men as each learned that his money had found its way back to his sack. The basis for their righteous indignation was gone. But the steward makes no mention of their money. All he wished to discover was the thief of the cup. From the oldest to the youngest, the steward made his way down the line until he reached Benjamin, the last. Their world came crashing in upon them all when the cup was discovered.

2. Guilt Admitted (44:14-17)

The self-confidence of only a few verses previous (verses 7-9) has been completely eroded away by the discovery of the cup. There is now no attempt at making a defense or giving any explanation. Instead, there is an admission of guilt, not just on Benjamin’s part but on the part of all. Joseph is still at home as the heartbroken party returns. They fall prostrate before him, no longer seeking justice as before (verses 7-9), but mercy. Joseph rebuked them for their wicked deed, again reminding them of his ability to learn (by “divination”) the true facts of the matter. They could not deceive him; he knew all. That is the thrust of his words. Judah seeks to convey their brokenness. They are without any defense. He does not acknowledge guilt in the matter of the cup, nor does he seek to give an explanation. He does confess that they now see the origin of this disaster. It is God against whom they have sinned (verse 16). It is not for the theft of Joseph’s cup that they are now in trouble, but for their sins of the past. While not stated Judah’s acknowledgment of sin must refer primarily to the sale of Joseph into slavery. As all were guilty of that sin (except Benjamin, interestingly), so they are all guilty before the governor of Egypt, and thus all are his slaves. They will suffer together since they shared in a common act of sin. But Joseph would not hear of this. Why should all suffer for the sin of

one? As a mere Egyptian he could not know of their past sins. He was only intent upon making matters right in regard to the theft of his silver cup. No, all would be sent home to their father except Benjamin, and he would remain as Joseph's slave (verse 17).

3. Judah's Appeal (44 18-34)

With a humble petition for forbearance, Judah beseeches his brother to give him the opportunity to tell the whole story from beginning to end (verse 18). It was Joseph who had inquired about their father and younger brother (verse 19), and they had responded with the truth. They had also mentioned that Benjamin had a brother who was deceased and that their father was deeply attached to Benjamin because he was the only remaining child of his mother (verse 20). It was Joseph who had insisted upon seeing this brother, although they had attempted to explain how their father would not want him out of his sight (verses 21-22). In spite of their efforts to dissuade him from it, Joseph had demanded to see this brother as proof of their honesty (verse 23). When they returned home, they reported all this to their father Jacob (verse 24). He later asked his sons to return for more grain, but they refused to go without Benjamin, for they took the Egyptian governor's words seriously (verses 25-26). Judah now attempts to paint an accurate picture of the pitiful condition of their father by reporting his words as spoken to his sons (verses 27-29). His beloved wife, he had said, had borne him only two sons. When the oldest went out from him and did not return, he was forced to conclude that this son had died, a victim of wild beasts. To take Benjamin, the only other son of Rachel, and not return with him would break his heart. Not only would he enter his grave in sorrow, but he also implied that his death would even be hastened by his grief. Judah's predicament is now described (verses 30-32). If Joseph can somehow understand the dilemma in which Judah finds himself, perhaps he will be sympathetic to his petition which concludes his appeal (verses 33-34). The life of this aged man of whom Joseph has inquired is inseparably intertwined with his youngest son, Benjamin (verse 30). To return to Canaan without this son would bring to pass that which Jacob himself had suggested, his untimely and uncomforted death (verse 31). And Judah is most directly related to this situation, for it is he who had assured his father of Benjamin's safe return, offering himself as surety (verse 32).

The facts have all been laid out. The situation is now seen in the light of what Benjamin's captivity would do to this patriarch about whom Joseph seemed to show concern. If only Joseph would consent to a substitution, much of this suffering could be averted. Let him remain as Joseph's prisoner, Judah pled (verse 33), for he could not bear to face his father without Benjamin. He would prefer to remain a slave in Egypt than to be free in Canaan and witness the pain and suffering he had helped to impose upon his father (verse 34).

The Fundamentals of Forgiveness (Genesis 45:1-28)

1. A Speech to the Speechless (45:1-15)

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they come closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the

earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, “God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. And you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, lest you and your household and all that you have be impoverished.”’ And behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth, which is speaking to you. Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here.” Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept; and Benjamin wept on his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him (Genesis 45:3-15).

Put yourselves in the sandals of these brothers for a moment. They had been treated graciously by Joseph, given the hospitality of his home and his table and bountiful provisions for their families back in Canaan (cf. 43:32-44:1). Then they were stopped and searched, each of them being found with their money in their sack and Benjamin with Joseph’s cup in his possession (44:6-13). Their guilt was acknowledged and all were willing to remain as Joseph’s slaves, but Joseph refused to detain any except Benjamin, the “guilty” party (44:14-17). Judah then made an impassioned appeal for mercy on his aged father, offering himself in place of Benjamin (44:18-34). It is at this point that chapter 45 begins. Judah and his brothers anxiously await a verdict from Joseph, one that will affect the course of their lives. Without knowing who Joseph is or what he intended to do, the brothers saw this potentate send everyone out of the room. They could perhaps see the tears flowing down his cheeks and his chest heaving with emotion. But what was the source of this great emotion? Was it anger, which would lead to further trouble? How could it be otherwise? If they thought the worst had come, it had not, at least in their minds, for now this Egyptian blurted out in their own tongue, “I am Joseph!” That was the worst news they could ever have hoped to hear. It brought them no relief, but only new avenues of anxiety. It was bad enough to stand before a powerful Egyptian governor who was angered at the theft of a cup, but to realize that he was their brother whom they had sold into slavery—that was too much! Before, they at least had a hope that this judge would be impartial and that mercy might motivate him to accept their appeal. But now their judge must surely be their enemy, whom they had unjustly condemned. How could they hope for better treatment from him? No wonder they were petrified (verses 3).

Fear and guilt were written on their ashen faces, and their silence confirmed this to Joseph. They had nothing more to say, no more appeals left, no hope for mercy. Every word recorded in the first 15 verses of chapter 45 is spoken by Joseph because his brothers were speechless (verse 3). Not until Joseph had demonstrated that he had forgiven them and loved them did they speak (verse 15). Joseph’s first words declared his identity, followed quickly by an indication of concern about his father (verse 3). He, like Judah and the others, cared greatly for his elderly father. The thought of Jacob’s grief was unbearable to Joseph as well as to the rest. But he also cared for his brothers. They must have shrunk back from him in horror, but Joseph asked them to draw near (verse 4). Nowhere in this chapter is the sin of his brothers minimized. At the very outset Joseph identified the treatment they had given him as sinful. Forgiveness, you see, does not seek to minimize sin, but to neutralize it. We must remember, though, that they have already come to the point of recognizing their actions as sin (42:21) and of repenting of it (chapter 44). Since they have come to recognize the magnitude of their sin, Joseph need not belabor that point. The stress, instead, falls upon the totality of the forgiveness he has given. Joseph’s words are filled with hope and encouragement. Verses 5-8 assure these men that their sin had not thwarted the purposes of God. “You sold me,” Joseph said, “but God sent me”

(verse 5). Their purpose was to destroy, but God's was to save. Men may sin by attempting to do what is unacceptable to God, while at the same time they are accomplishing what God has purposed. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God assures us that while men may do the wrong thing for the wrong reasons, God can cause that "evil" to accomplish His good and perfect purposes (Psalm 76:10).

Salvation, not destruction, was the purpose of God in what had happened. How, then, could Joseph even consider doing to his brothers what they feared? The famine, now two years long, had five years remaining before it had run its appointed course. Jacob and his sons must come to Egypt where Joseph could provide for them, thus sparing the nation. While God did not sanction their means or their motives, Joseph was destined to go to Egypt where he would be the instrument by which Israel would be spared as a remnant and which would later be kept alive by a "great deliverance". This prophecy goes beyond the previous revelation given to Abram concerning Israel's sojourn in Egypt: And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions" (Genesis 15:13-14). In the final analysis, it was not his brothers who were responsible for sending Joseph to Egypt, but God, for the purpose of bringing about their salvation. And in the process Joseph was elevated to his position of power and prominence, advisor to Pharaoh and ruler over all of Egypt. We have a saying, "All's well that ends well," which finds a measure of truth in these words of Joseph. Joseph's explanation of all that had happened and God's reason for it is followed by an exhortation to return quickly to the land of Canaan, get their father, their families, and their flocks and return to Egypt (verses 9-13).

2. Pharaoh Is Pleased (45:16-24)

Pharaoh had received the report that there was a reunion between Joseph and his brothers. I can think of only two reasons why Pharaoh should be so pleased to hear of the arrival of Joseph's brothers. The first reason is obvious: Pharaoh had the greatest respect for Joseph. Joseph had virtually saved his kingdom and would greatly enhance his position in Egypt (47:13-26). Anything that pleased Joseph would make Pharaoh happy. Pharaoh promised them to be in the best of the land of Egypt. Before their departure to Canaan, Joseph gave his brothers provisions for their journey, as commanded by Pharaoh, as well as some last minute instructions. Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. To each of them he gave changes of garments, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of garments. And to his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and sustenance for his father on the journey. So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the journey" (Genesis 45:21-24).

3. Jacob Rejuvenated (45:25-28)

Then they went up from Egypt, and come to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. And they told him, saying, "Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." But he was stunned, for he did not believe them. When they told him all the words of Joseph that he had spoken to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. Then Israel said, "It is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die" (Genesis 45:25-28). All of the evidence led to the conclusion that Joseph was indeed alive. The broken spirit of Jacob was immediately revived. He now yearned to see his son before his death. And lest we think that Jacob was on the verge of death, let us recall that he had yet seventeen years to spend with his son in Egypt (47:28). All that Jacob had

feared was going against him suddenly appeared in its true light. It was the hand of God in his life, sparing him from the physical and spiritual death of Canaan by preparing a place for him in Egypt.

4. Principles of Forgiveness

Let us seek to lay down some principles of forgiveness, which we learn from the example of Joseph in Genesis 45.

(1) Biblical forgiveness should be granted quickly. Joseph could hardly have granted forgiveness to his brothers here in chapter 45. The forgiveness that was expressed for the first time here by Joseph was first experienced here by his brothers, but long before this, Joseph had forgiven these men in his heart. How else could he have walked so closely to his Lord and so cheerfully and faithfully served, regardless of his circumstances? Joseph had experienced the freedom of forgiveness long before his brothers. In the New Testament, anger is always to be dealt with quickly: Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity (Ephesians 4:26-27). The sooner forgiveness is granted and reconciliation is achieved, the better it is for all involved: Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way; in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison (Matthew 5:25).

(2) Biblical forgiveness should be granted privately. I see a great deal of wisdom in Joseph requiring his servants to leave the room while he dealt with the sins of his brothers. It made matters much easier for Pharaoh and the Egyptians to be ignorant of all the injustices these brothers had committed against Joseph. This, too, is according to biblical instruction: Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions (Proverbs 10:12). And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother (Matthew 18:15). We should always seek restoration and reconciliation on the lowest, most private level so that the fewer there are who are aware of the sin, the easier the offender can be forgiven and forgotten.

(3) Biblical forgiveness must be given freely and unconditionally. Forgiveness is free in that the for-giver willingly accepts the loss or pain personally. In brief, forgiveness is a matter of grace, not works, and grace does not make demands upon the one who receives it. Joseph must have forgiven his brothers long before they had come to repentance. He did not wait to see the anguish of their souls until he forgave them, but he did so freely and without requirement. This suggests also that forgiveness may be refused. As He was dying upon the cross, our Lord said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). That forgiveness accomplished by His death on the cross is rejected by many. Those who perish do not do so because there is no forgiveness, but because they have rejected God's forgiveness.

(4) Forgiveness that is biblical must be granted sacrificially. The price of Joseph's forgiveness was more than twenty years of separation from his father, slavery, and even a sentence in prison. Not a small price to pay, but then forgiveness does not come without sacrifice. Because of this, forgiveness is better shown than said. Joseph never actually used the word "forgive," but his words and actions conveyed it. Just as it is too easy to say, "I'm sorry," so it is possible to glibly say, "I forgive you." Genuine forgiveness has a price tag, and few are those who are willing to pay it.

(5) Biblical forgiveness is not provisional, but permanent. Just as conditions cannot be demanded before forgiveness is granted, neither can they be laid down for forgiveness to remain in force. Seventeen years after Joseph assured his brothers they were forgiven, they feared that this grace had terminated at the death of their father (50:15-21). While we will hardly "forget" the transgressions of others against us, we can cer-

tainly refuse to call them to remembrance or to dredge them up in the future. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jeremiah 31:34).

(6) Biblical forgiveness seeks the correction and restoration of the offender. Joseph forgave his brothers years before he saw them, but remember that it was a year or so until he disclosed his identity to them. This was because he needed to be assured that they had changed their attitude toward their sin (repented). When our children sin we may very well need to spank them as well as to forgive them. We may forgive the thief for stealing our money, which we may never see again, but the law still exacts a punishment for theft. A forgiving spirit dissolves our anger and animosity toward the offender, and it commits our vengeance to God, since He alone knows the extent of the sin (Romans 12:11-21; I Peter 2:21-25). Forgiveness, as I understand it, deals first of all with our personal animosity and violated rights in such a way that we can deal with sin impartially and lovingly, or we can commit the matter entirely to God where we cannot or should not take matters into our own hands. Forgiveness, like one facet of love, seeks the best interest of another, even at our own expense. But since we do seek the good of the other party, correction may be required (Matthew 18:15ff.; Galatians 6:1).

5. The Basis of Forgiveness

How can we forgive those who have hurt us so deeply? Let me make several suggestions.

(1) Seriously consider the Scriptures which command us to forgive (Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:12-17, etc.). Recognize that forgiveness is not an option, but a command.

(2) Consider your own sinfulness and the forgiveness, which God has freely given you. And Jesus answered and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he replied, “Say it, Teacher.” “A certain money-lender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?” Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more. And He said to him, “You have judged correctly.” And turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And He said to her, “Your sins have been forgiven” (Luke 7:40-48).

(3) Meditate upon the sovereignty of God in the offense committed against you. Can you say, like Joseph, “And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good ...” (Genesis 50:20)? The doctrine of the sovereignty of God means that whatever evil is committed against us has been designed by God to come into our lives for a purpose that is good (Romans 8:28). Job’s suffering at Satan’s hand (and by God’s permission—Job 1, 2) resulted in praise to God, instruction for Satan, and a lesson for Job. In the final analysis, Job was blessed far more than he had been before his trials began (cf. Job 42:10-17). When a messenger of Satan buffeted Paul, it was to produce humility and to teach him that God’s strength comes in our weakness (II Corinthians 12:7-9). Behind our enemy is a loving God, who brings affliction and **suffering into our lives for our good and His glory.**

(4) Give careful consideration to the matter of servanthood. Usually we find that when others mistreat us we battle with our offended pride, and we struggle because our rights have been violated. Forgiveness originates from a servant-like attitude. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind

let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:3-8). The supreme example of humility is our Lord Himself. He set aside His rights and prerogatives in order to be rejected of men and hanged (innocently) upon a cruel cross. Servanthood for our Lord spelled out suffering and shame for the good of others. Forgiveness is not so difficult for the humble as it is for the haughty. If our sinless Savior was willing to die on the cross for sinners, is it such a great thing for Him to ask us to sacrifice our own interests for those of others? (I Peter 2:18-25).

(5) Meditate on the characteristics of biblical love. It is not an emotional feeling, but a decision of the will. Its earmarks are described by Paul for us to contemplate: Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (I Corinthians 13:4-7). Have you found the forgiveness of your sins in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary? Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, came to earth and took upon Himself the reproaches of men and the rejection of God. He became sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21) and suffered its painful consequences. You may find forgiveness from your sins by trusting that Jesus Christ died in your place and bore your sins on the cross.

Life Begins at 130 (Genesis 46:1-47:12)

1. Divine Guidance (46:1-7)

So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” And He said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes.” Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob and their little ones and their wives, in the wagons, which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. And they took their livestock and their property, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and came to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him: his sons and his grandsons with him, his daughters and his granddaughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt (Genesis 46:1-7).

Jacob had hastily packed his belongings, gathered his family, and begun the long trek to Egypt, just as Joseph had urged (45:9). When he had gotten as far as Beersheba, Jacob seemed to feel the full impact of what he was setting out to do. Beersheba was a place rich in the history of his forefathers. Abraham had called upon the name of the Lord here (21:33) and had settled in this place after offering up Isaac on Mt. Moriah (22:19). Here at Beersheba Isaac had been visited by God, and the covenant made with Abraham was reiterated (26:23-25). It would seem that Jacob lived at Beersheba when he deceived his father and obtained his blessing (chapter 27), for it was from this place that he had fled from Esau and departed to Haran (28:10). Beersheba was also at the southern extremity of the land of Canaan. Later the land of promise would be spoken of as “from Dan to Beersheba” (e.g., Judges 20:1), Dan being at the northern border and Beersheba at the south. God assured Jacob that it was His will for him to depart from Canaan to dwell in Egypt. The entire family now made their way to Egypt with Jacob the patriarch.

2. The Genealogy of Jacob (46:8-27)

Several observations seem necessary to understand the purpose for including the genealogy of Jacob at this point in the book of Genesis. First, in later genealogical lists slight differences appear, but this is only to be expected and does not in any way affect the reliability of the accounts. Second, by-and-large, women are not included in this list. This is not because they are unimportant, but because it does not fit the purpose of the listing. Third, the expression “the sons of Israel” (verse 8) must be taken in the broader sense of “the descendants of Israel,” for more than his sons are named, and thus some of those named may not have been born at the time Jacob and his descendants went down to Egypt. Fourth, all those named in Numbers 26 as heads of tribes or families are found in this listing of descendants in Genesis 46. The explanation for all of these observations is rather simple: Moses here intended not to name every person who went into Egypt, but every leader of family or clan who would come forth from Egypt. It was vitally important for those who came forth from Egypt to know their “roots” since the land would be divided according to tribes. In addition to this, tasks were assigned and the nation was administrated by tribal and family divisions. The purpose of Moses in this genealogy, therefore, is selective. It does not intend to name every person coming out of Canaan, but to name those who will become tribe and family heads. Thus there is a genealogical continuity throughout the entire sojourn in Egypt.

3. Joseph Greets Jacob (46:28-30)

More years have been lived away from Joseph than with him. Now, after a separation of nearly 22 years, father and son meet once again in happy reunion: Now he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out the way before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. And Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time. Then Israel said to Joseph, “Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive” (Genesis 46:28-30). Judah had been sent ahead by his father to get directions to Goshen. Israel proceeded ahead, guided by Judah, until their party arrived in Goshen. Joseph traveled there by chariot and met his father. Years of fears, regrets, and bitterness must have flowed from the soul of the patriarch as the tears flooded from his eyes. Much that could have been said of this reunion was not recorded, for it was an intimacy not to be invaded by curious eyes. Jacob, satisfied at the sight of his son, was now ready to die in peace (verse 30), but God still had 17 years of blessing in store for him (47:28).

4. Getting Goshen (46:31-47:6)

Pharaoh had already promised Joseph’s family the best of Egypt (45:18), but Joseph was careful to see to it that this became reality. His family was sent to Goshen even before he greeted them or they were presented before Pharaoh. When Joseph reported the arrival of his family, he knew that Pharaoh would want an interview with them. They were told to stress the fact that they were shepherds and that this was their sole occupation, as it had been for generations. This would assure that they would be given the land of Goshen, not only because it would provide pasture for their flocks, but also because it would keep the Hebrews somewhat removed from the Egyptians, who despised shepherds (46:34). The conversation went as Joseph expected, and the result was that Pharaoh gave Joseph’s family the land of Goshen to dwell in. Furthermore, since Pharaoh owned herds also, some of Joseph’s family could be employed in caring for his livestock (verse 6). I doubt that this was the kind of job many of the Egyptians were willing to accept, disliking shepherds as they did. But why was getting Goshen such an important objective that so many verses were devoted to the details of its acquisition, while such an emotional moment as the reunion of Jacob and Joseph was so sketchily described? Let me suggest several reasons, beginning with those least important. First,

Goshen must have been some of the best land in Egypt. That is what Pharaoh promised (45:18) and what he professed to give (47:6). Second, it was located near enough to Joseph that he could see his family frequently: And you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have (Genesis 45:10). By far the most important reason for settling in the land of Goshen was in order to keep his family isolated and insulated from the culture and religion of Egypt.

5. A Patriarch Blesses a Pharaoh (47:7-12)

The time came for Joseph to present his father to Pharaoh. Pharaoh's graciousness to Jacob no doubt reveals his respect for this aged man as well as his regard for Joseph. How strange it seems to read that Jacob blessed Pharaoh (47:7,10). While it is possible that this was little more than a greeting, I take it in the stronger (and much more common) sense of blessing, such as that in the next chapter (48:15,20). After all, the Abrahamic Covenant contained the promise that Abraham and his offspring would be a blessing to all those who blessed them: And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Is this not what we see taking place in chapter 47? Pharaoh had greatly exalted Joseph and blessed him. Now he is extending that blessing to all of Joseph's family. Jacob responds by pronouncing a blessing upon Pharaoh. And indeed, Pharaoh was blessed by Israel. Joseph had virtually saved his kingdom, and in the next section he will obtain possession of almost all of Egypt's wealth, including the people themselves (47:13-26). The presence of Israel in Egypt was a blessing to this emerging nation, but it also greatly blessed the Egyptians. The Abrahamic Covenant is finding partial fulfillment in this sojourn.

The most surprising feature of Jacob's interview with Pharaoh is Jacob's appraisal of his life to this point in time: So Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning" (Genesis 47:9). Jacob has told Pharaoh that his life has been short and sour. That isn't a very good case for Christianity is it? The thrust of much evangelism today is that trusting Christ and following God makes your life happy, joyful, and free from trials and tribulation. If it hadn't been for the testimony of Joseph, Pharaoh would have thought very poorly of the God of Israel. And yet what Jacob said was true. His earthly beginnings were prophetic of his life. He struggled with his brother in the womb (25:21-26). He lived in a home where the parents were divided in their affection for their children (25:28). He gained the blessing of his father by deception and then was alienated from his family because of the hatred of Esau (chapter 27). He spent years in exile, serving his deceitful uncle Laban. He sought one wife and ended up with four (29:18ff.), and the outcome of this was continual competition and strife (29:30ff.). He finally fled from his uncle and eventually had to make a non-aggression pact with him lest further conflict arise (chapter 31). He suffered the loss of the purity of his daughter Dinah at Shechem and feared the reprisal of Canaanite kinsmen when his sons killed the men of the city and took the women, children, and cattle as booty (chapter 34). Rachel, his most beloved wife, died prematurely along the way to Bethlehem (35:16-19). His oldest son lay with one of his concubines (35:22), and his favorite son was tragically lost and presumed dead. Finally, there was the famine, which threatened the existence of his family, and the second in command to Pharaoh appeared to be taking even his youngest son away. Jacob, you see, was correct in his evaluation of his life. So Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had ordered. And Joseph provided his father and his brothers and his entire father's household with food, according to their little ones (Genesis 47:11-12).

A Proper Perspective of Poverty and Prosperity (Genesis 47:13-31)

1. Pharaoh's Prosperity and Egypt's Poverty (47:13-26)

For two years now the famine has been severe in Egypt and Canaan (45:5). All private reserves of wheat have been exhausted, and all the money of Egypt and Canaan had been spent in buying government grain from Joseph. And the famine lingered on and on. In desperation the Egyptians approached Joseph, reminding him of their plight. Joseph knew that while their money was gone their wealth was not, for they still possessed many cattle. Had these cattle remained the possession of the Egyptians they would have perished, for there was no grass for pasture and no grain for feed. And who but Pharaoh would want them, for no one could sustain them through these years of drought? In this sense Joseph did the Egyptians a favor to take the cattle off their hands by exchanging them for grain which they must have to survive. Some of these livestock may have been purchased by the Israelites, who were keepers of flocks (46:34) and who were relatively unaffected by the famine (47:27). Many, if not all, of the flocks, which Joseph purchased for Pharaoh, may have been cared for by Joseph's brothers (47:6).

And so the ownership of the land in Egypt changed hands—that is, all the land except that being acquired by the Israelites (verse 27) or maintained by the priests, who were supported (like the Israelites) by Pharaoh (verse 22). The people were brought in from the rural areas to the cities (verse 21). This was probably for a couple of administrative reasons. First of all, the grain was stored in the cities (41:35) and thus could be more efficiently distributed there. Perhaps also, removing the people from their land made the transfer of ownership more tangible and permanent. Once their land was left, the emotional attachment to it would tend to weaken. The terms of the servitude of the Egyptians were spelled out by Joseph (verses 23-24). Joseph acquired both the people and their land for Pharaoh. When the famine ended, he would provide them with seed for planting. When crops were again harvested, one fifth would be given to Pharaoh. The rest would belong to the people for food, fodder, and seed for the next crop.

2. Israel's Prosperity and Egypt's Poverty (47:27)

Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous (Genesis 47:27).

3. Jacob Prepares for His Death (47:28-31)

Jacob, who seemed to be dying for years, lived longer than he expected. But as he approached his death, we can see that his prosperity in Egypt did not change his priorities: And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years. When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said." And he said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed (Genesis 47:28-31). Knowing that the day of his departure drew near, Jacob purposed to make his death a testimony to his faith and a stimulus to the faith and obedience of his descendants. Jacob urged Joseph, his most trusted son, to swear a solemn oath promising that he would not bury his father in Egypt, but in Canaan in the cave of Machpelah with his forefathers. This would serve as a reminder to his descendants that Egypt was not home, but only a place to sojourn until God brought them back "home" to Canaan, the land of promise. Having been assured of his request, Jacob

bowed in worship on the head of his staff. It is this incident, coupled with the blessing of Joseph's sons in chapter 49, which the writer to the Hebrews cites as evidence of the faith of Jacob: By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff (Hebrews 11:21).

The View From the Graveyard (Genesis 48:1-22)

1. The Adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim (48:1-7)

The last days of Jacob's earthly sojourn drew to a close. Sensing this, Joseph was summoned to his father's side where Jacob pronounced a unique blessing upon him. The death of which Jacob had so frequently spoken and, at one time, desired was now soon to visit him. Joseph took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, along with him to see their grandfather one final time and to bid him farewell. Gathering up his strength, Jacob sat up in bed in order to speak words of vital significance to Joseph. While Jacob's words were reminiscent of the past, this was no muddled musing as one might expect of an aged man nearing his final hour. Instead, Jacob focused Joseph's attention upon the two most important events of his life as an explanation for what he was about to do. Then Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.' And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance" (Genesis 48:1-6). Reuben, due to his sin of lying with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine (35:22), would be stripped of his birthright (cf. 49:4). This privilege was conveyed upon Joseph, but in an unusual way. No doubt the normal course would have been to give the birthright to the next son, Simeon, or to the next after him, Levi, but both of these sons were guilty of the mass murder of the Shechemites (34:25ff.). It was Joseph instead who was to receive the rights of the firstborn. Jacob achieved his purpose by adopting both of Joseph's sons as his own, on a par with Reuben and Simeon (verse 5). Now each of them would receive one portion, but in so doing Joseph received a double portion: And I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow (Genesis 48:22).

The primary focus of Jacob in his report to Joseph was the promise of the land of Canaan and the assurance that Jacob would become a numerous people, a company of peoples (verse 4). If God had assured Jacob of becoming a great and numerous people, then surely he was justified in adopting two more sons who would contribute to this proliferation of people. If the justification for Jacob's adoption of Joseph's sons is found in the promise God had made at Bethel, the reason seems to be reported in verse 7: Now as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan on the Journey, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem) (Genesis 48:7). Joseph was the son of Rachel, Jacob's chosen wife. His partiality to Joseph significantly contributed to Joseph's rejection by his brothers and his journey to Egypt (cf. 37:4). A major factor in his preference for Joseph was the fact that he was the first-born of Rachel, his bride by choice. (Leah was his wife "by chance," Bilhah and Zilpah "by competition.") While Rachel was the younger of his wives, she died prematurely on the way to Ephrath (Bethlehem). By inference, had she not died so early in life she would have presented Jacob with many other sons. The adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh provided Jacob with two more sons, technically "through Rachel." The promise of God at Bethel in combination with the preference of Jacob for Rachel provides the backdrop for the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh. In addition to this must be mentioned the faithfulness of Joseph to the God of his fathers, even while in a foreign land and in adverse circumstances. He, as the savior of his people, surely was worthy of the favor his father bestowed upon him.

2. The Blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (48:8-22)

The adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh was primarily a privilege granted to Joseph rather than an act of partiality toward his sons. It is a blessing upon Joseph through his two sons: When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said,

“Who are these?” And Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me here.” So he said, “Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.” Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face, and behold, God has let me see your children as well.” Then Joseph took them from his knees, and bowed with his face to the ground. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel’s right, and brought them close to him. But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the first-born (Genesis 48:8-14).

Jacob’s vision was dim with years. Joseph, knowing that his father was about to bless them (verse 9), drew the boys, now near the age of twenty, from his father in order to arrange them properly for the blessing. Manasseh, the eldest, he had at his left hand (Jacob’s right), and Ephraim was at Joseph’s right hand (Jacob’s left). This was intended so that Jacob’s right hand would rest upon Manasseh, the oldest. Israel surprised Joseph by crossing his hands and pronouncing this blessing: And he blessed Joseph, and said, “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, The angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; And may my name live on in them, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Genesis 48:15-16).

When Joseph saw his father crossing his hands and giving the preeminence to Ephraim, he assumed it was a mistake and attempted to correct it, but he learned from his father that his action was intentional. When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim’s head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the first-born. Place your right hand on his head.” But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people and he also shall be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” And he blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel shall pronounce blessing, saying, ‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!’” Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh (Genesis 48:17-20). Jacob purposed to establish the younger over the older. The book of Genesis is full of instances in which the younger was chosen over the older. Seth was chosen over Cain; Shem over Japheth; Isaac over Ishmael; Jacob over Esau; and now, Ephraim over Manasseh. Of course, it was not always to be so. Jacob had endeavored to choose Rachel over Leah, but Laban was not about to let this happen. In the providence of God, neither was He, for Leah was the first wife of Jacob, the mother of Judah, the head of the messianic line, and Levi, the head of the priestly line. Leah, not Rachel, was given the honor of being buried with Jacob in the cave of Machpelah (49:31). In the choice of Ephraim above Manasseh the principle of divine election is clearly illustrated based upon the previous knowledge of God for the future as reported by St. Paul: And not only this, but there was Rebecca also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac, for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, “The older will serve the younger” (Romans 9:10-12).

Having given priority to Ephraim, the younger, Jacob now turns again to Joseph to give him yet another blessing before the other sons are called to his bedside: Then Israel said to Joseph, “Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. And I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow” (Genesis 48:21-22). The term “portion” is literally Shechem, later, Joseph’s bones were brought up from Egypt and buried at Shechem (Joshua 24:32).

The Purpose of Prophecy (Genesis 49:1-28)

1. Reuben (49:3-4)

Reuben, by virtue of his position as the first-born of Jacob, should have had pre-eminence over his brothers and the double portion of the inheritance (which was given to Joseph (48:5,6,22; I Chronicles 5:1-2). But these were taken from Reuben because of his instability: Reuben, you are my first-born; My might and the beginning of my strength, Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch (Genesis 49:3-4). Reuben, like Satan, was not content with his exalted position and wanted more power, more pre-eminence (Isaiah 14:12; Ezekiel 28:12). He therefore took Bilhah, his father's concubine, not because of her sexual desirability, but because she was symbolic of the right to rule over the family. To possess the harem of the ruler was to usurp the authority of the ruler (I Kings 2:13). Since “the last shall be first” (Mark 10:31) and those who serve shall rule in the kingdom of God (Mark 9:35), Reuben had to be rejected from his position of power and pre-eminence. He who would rule must surely first rule himself.

2. Simeon and Levi (49:5-7)

Like Reuben, Simeon and Levi had demonstrated character that was not befitting to godliness: Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are implements of violence. Let my soul not enter into their council; Let not my glory be united with their assembly; because in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they lamed oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel. I will disperse them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel (Genesis 49:5-7).

These two brothers of Dinah were greatly angered by the violation of her purity at the hand of Shechem, but it was not righteous indignation. By their submitting to circumcision they had deceived the men of Shechem, letting them believe that a treaty was being ratified. And in their anger they slew the men of the city. The hamstringing of the oxen was a further evidence of their uncontrolled anger, a detail not mentioned in the account of Genesis 34:25-30. Horses were hamstrung because of their military use, pulling chariots (Joshua 11:6), but oxen were used for peaceful purposes. The hamstringing of these oxen evidenced wanton violence and senseless destruction. The alliance of Simeon and Levi was an unholy one, and thus, like those at Babel who joined together in disobedience (Genesis 11:1), they would be dispersed.

3. Judah (49:8-12)

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, or the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. He ties his foal to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are dull from wine. And his teeth white from milk (Genesis 49:8-12).

The pre-eminence, which was taken from Reuben, is clearly transferred to his younger brother, Judah (also I Chronicles 5:2). He would not only rule over his brothers in the days to come, but he would also prevail over his enemies (verse 8). His military might is compared to the strength of a lion (verse 9). Verse 10 has long been held to be a messianic prophecy by both Jews and Christians, and the word “Shiloh” refers to the person of the Messiah. The prosperity of the tribe of Judah is depicted in verses 11 and 12. He will be so blessed in the vineyard that his vines will be strong enough to hold fast a young donkey, and the produce of the vine will be so abundant that he could, so to speak, wash his garments in its wine. In other words, wine will be as abundant as water. The quantity

would be sufficient to more than meet a man's capacity to consume it, thus the reddening of the eyes (verse 12). The cattle will prosper such that milk will also be readily available (verse 12).

The first four sons referred to are the offspring of Jacob and Leah. The next six are the sons of the concubines of Rachel and Leah. The last two sons are the children of Jacob and Rachel, the wife of his preference.

4. Zebulun and Issachar (49:13-15)

Zebulun shall dwell at the seashore; And he shall be a haven for ships, And his flank shall be toward Sidon (Genesis 49:13). In Joshua 19:10-16 we will know that Zebulun's land was approaching closely to Sidon and so enriched by seaborne. In contrast to Judah, who subdued his enemies like a lion, Issachar failed to do so, and as a result, instead submitted to the service of the Canaanites.

5. Dan (49:16-18)

Dan shall judge his people, As one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, A horned snake in the path, Which bites the horse's heels, So that his rider falls backward (Genesis 49:16-17). Dan was the first child of Rachel, through Bilhah her handmaid (Genesis 30:1-6). Rachel felt that she would be vindicated through this son, and thus his name suggested that God had heard her cries and had judged in her favor. Dan would judge his people, as one of the sons of Israel, but he would eventually serve more destructive purposes. The incident in Judges 18 serves to reflect the bent, which this tribe took. In the listing of the tribes of Israel in Revelation 7:5-8, Dan is omitted. Verse 18: "For thy salvation I wait, O Lord (Genesis 49:18). Jacob wanted to say that salvation surely will not come from his sons, but from God. Salvation will not come from within, but from without.

6. Gad and Asher (49:19-20)

As for Gad, raiders shall raid him, but he shall raid at their heels. As for Asher, his food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties (Genesis 49:19-20). Gad would be continually plagued by his neighbors, but would not be overcome. Asher, With a fertile plain and trade routes to the sea, ... would 'dip his foot in oil' (Duet. 33:24) and produce a notable annual quota for the palace (I Ki. 4:7).

7. Naphtali (49:21)

Naphtali is a doe let loose, He gives beautiful words (Genesis 49:21). The portrait of Naphtali's future is one of unhindered freedom and increase. Under Barak, Israel was led to break their bonds (Judges 4-5).

8. Joseph (49:22-26)

While he is greatly blessed by God, he does not have the privilege of being the forefather of Messiah, as does Judah. Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob. (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), From the God of your father who helps you, And by the Almighty who blesses you With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers (Genesis 49:22-26). Joseph's future is described as one of fruitfulness and abundance. He will be pre-eminent among his brothers, but not in the same way as Judah. Because of Ephraim's pride (Judges 8:1; 12:1) and apostasy (Hosea 4:17; 5:3f.), enjoyment of these blessings was not what it could have been.

9. Benjamin (49:27)

Jacob described Benjamin as one who would be fierce and aggressive: Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he devours the prey, And in the evening he divides the spoil (Genesis 49:27). This side of Benjamin can be seen in Judges 19-21. Moses, in a later pronouncement of blessing, has a more gentle word about Benjamin: Of Benjamin he said, “May the beloved of the Lord dwell in security by Him, Who shields him all the day, And he dwells between His shoulders” (Deuteronomy 33:12).

The End of An Era (Genesis 49:29-50:26)**1. Jacob Chooses His Cemetery Site (49:29-33)**

Then he charged them and said to them, “I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site. There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebecca, and there I buried Leah—the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth.” When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people (Genesis 49:29-33). Clear orders are given, but not for the first time (47:29-31), concerning his burial in Canaan. He was to be taken up to Canaan to the field of Machpelah, and buried in the cave along with his grandfather Abraham, and his father Isaac, and their wives. Leah, too, was buried there, and it would seem that at that time he had hewn out a place in the cave for his own burial (50:5). A very precise description of the cave, the field, and its location was given so that no mistakes would be made. Knowing that he had fulfilled all of his obligations, Jacob drew up his feet into the bed and shortly, if not immediately, died (verse 33). It would seem that death could not claim him until all of his final responsibilities were completed.

2. The Grief of Joseph and the Egyptians (50:1-3)

Then Joseph fell on his father’s face, and wept over him and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days (Genesis 50:1-3). Joseph was probably closer to Jacob than any of his brothers. He wept over his father and kissed him. Then those whose duty it was to care for Joseph’s medical needs^{vi} were commissioned to embalm Jacob (verse 2). This was a lengthy process of 40 days duration (verse 3). As a gesture of respect, love, and sympathy, the Egyptians joined Joseph in mourning Jacob’s death a total of 70 days before the burial plan was put into action.

The process of embalming among the ancient Egyptians is thus described by Herodotus: “The body was given to the embalmers, who first took out the brains and entrails and washed them in palm wine impregnated with strong astringent drugs; after which they began to anoint the body with the oil of cedar, myrrh, cinnamon, and cassia; and this lasted thirty days. They next put it into a solution of nitre (saltpetre) for forty days longer, so that they allowed seventy days to complete the embalming; after which they bound it up in swathes of linen besmeared with gum. Being then able to resist putrefaction, it was delivered to the relatives, inclosed in a wooden or paper case somewhat resembling a coffin, and laid in the catacomb or grave belonging to the family, where it was placed in an upright posture against the wall.”

3. The Burial of Jacob (50:4-14)

Embalming was the customary Egyptian preparation of dignitaries for burial. For Jacob's burial this was especially helpful for it was a long way back to Canaan to the cave where Jacob was to be laid to rest. Perhaps it was due to the same logistical problem that forced Jacob to bury Rachel along the way rather than to transport her body to the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 35:16-20).

Joseph's next task was to secure the permission of Pharaoh to leave Egypt, along with all the adult members of the Israelite nation. And when the days of mourning for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your sight, please speak to Pharaoh, saying, 'My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am about to die; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.'" Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father; then I will return." And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear" (Genesis 50:4-6). Joseph is said to have asked other Egyptian officials to petition Pharaoh to leave the land temporarily. This may be due to some kind of ceremonial defilement that would make Joseph's personal appearance and appeal offensive to Pharaoh. A report of Jacob's instructions that were sworn as an oath was included in the petition. Joseph reminded Pharaoh that this was Jacob's strong desire and that he was sworn to carry through with it. This was to assure that Pharaoh would not take offense to Jacob's burial in Canaan rather than Egypt. Without reservation, Joseph's request was granted.

Few funeral processions have been so long or so large: So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father's household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen. There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company (Genesis 50:7-9). Joseph was accompanied by a large delegation of high-ranking Egyptian officials, many, if not all of whom, were subordinate to Joseph (cf. 40:40-44). Verse seven seems to indicate that men of various rank and offices went with Joseph to bury Jacob. In addition, all of Jacob's adult family went along (verse 8). Attached to this large procession was a large company of horsemen and charioteers. Providing transportation and security seems to have been their assignment (verse 9).

Upon reaching Canaan, the ceremony was so awesome it made a profound impression on the inhabitants of the land. When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed seven days mourning for his father. Now when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians." Therefore it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan (Genesis 50:10-11). For an unknown reason, the procession made its way from Egypt to Canaan by means of an unusual route. Rather than traveling to the north and approaching Canaan from the west, they proceeded northeasterly and entered Canaan from the east, from the other side of the Jordan (verse 10). Shortly after crossing the Jordan into Canaan, the procession halted at a place identified as "the threshing floor of Atad" (verse 10). Here a seven-day period of mourning was observed which especially attracted the attention of the Canaanites who lived near (verse 11). The seven-day mourning period may have been primarily for the Egyptians, allowing them one final opportunity to grieve with Joseph and his family. From here it would seem that Jacob's family proceeded on with the body to the cave of Machpelah where Jacob was buried. This would then have been a more private family matter neither participated in by the Egyptians nor viewed with curiosity by the Canaanites.

Moses reminds us that in so doing the charge of Jacob to his sons was exactly carried out. And thus his sons did for him as he had charged them; for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field for a burial site from

Ephron the Hittite. And after he had buried his father Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father (Genesis 50:12-14). Having completed their mission, this large entourage, the Israelites, would then have returned to the threshing floor of Atad, rejoined their retinue of Egyptians, and returned en masse to Egypt.

4. Not Grief, But Guilt (50:15-21)

While the death of Jacob undoubtedly occasioned grief on the part of Joseph's brothers, another emotion seems to have prevailed—guilt. When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" (Genesis 50:15). For a long time feelings of jealousy and hatred had been growing like a cancer in the souls of Jacob's "other" sons (37:2-4). More than once they must have considered a plan to eliminate Joseph, but one thing always prevented it—Jacob. Sometime, somehow, an occasion would arise when Jacob would not be present and then they could get rid of Joseph. The golden opportunity came when Jacob sent Joseph to them, many miles from home, far from the protection he had afforded to his favorite son (37:12) Now, years later, they were still plagued with guilt about their treatment of Joseph (42:21-22). They had not yet fathomed Joseph's forgiveness, even though 17 years had evidenced nothing but grace. But, they reasoned, that was a time when Jacob still lived. Would Joseph not hesitate to retaliate with his father present even as they had waited for an opportune moment away from their father to eliminate Joseph? Now Jacob was gone for good. Joseph was free to do with them as he pleased. That thought consumed them, even more than the loss of their father. This fear prompted a plan, which they hoped would soften Joseph's anger. So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, 'Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him (Genesis 50:16-18). A message was conveyed to Joseph, perhaps through Benjamin. Joseph was told that Jacob had yet another charge not yet made known, to which Joseph was urged to submit. Before his death Jacob had requested that Joseph forgive his other sons for their sins. Having sent this message ahead, perhaps by Benjamin, the brothers appeared before Joseph. Humbly they fell before Joseph pledging their obedience and submission (verse 18). They now volunteered to do the very thing which Joseph had predicted (37:5-9) and which they had sought to avoid (37:19-20).

Joseph's response is a model for all who would respond in a godly way to ungodly persecution: But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them (Genesis 50:19-21). Vengeance belongs to God, not man. Joseph would not consider usurping a prerogative which belonged only to God (Romans 12:19; I Thessalonians 5:15; I Peter 4:19). Furthermore, while their attitudes and actions were evil, the result was intended by God for the good of all (verse 20; 45:5-8; Acts 2:23). How could Joseph be angry when good had come of their sin through God's providence? Instead, Joseph returned kindness for cruelty (Proverbs 25:21-22; Romans 12:20,21). The kindness Joseph had shown while his father was alive would continue he reassured them.

5. The Death and Burial of Joseph (50:22-26)

More than 50 years elapsed between verses 21 and 22. Moses was intent upon placing the deaths of Jacob and Joseph side by side. Irrelevant details are therefore set aside to take us directly to the deathbed of Joseph, and thus to parallel the death of Jacob. Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely

take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.” Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here.” So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt (Genesis 50:22-26). Joseph’s life was full at the age of 110 (verse 22). He lived long enough to hold his great-great-grandsons on his knee (verse 23). Knowing that the day of his death drew near, Joseph like Jacob, charged his brothers concerning his burial. He did not wish his body to be carried back to Canaan, as Jacob had insisted. While the burial of Jacob and Joseph are quite different, they are both reflective of the same faith and hope. Both believed that Israel’s blessings in the future would be realized in the land of promise. Both were embalmed—Jacob so that his body could be carried on the long journey to Canaan by his sons, Joseph so that his body could wait for the exodus at which time his bones would be returned to Canaan, borne by the Israelites: And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God shall surely take care of you; and you shall carry my bones from here with you” (Exodus 13:19). Both men, Jacob and Joseph, determined that their death and burial would be a testimony to their faith and a stimulus to the faith of their offspring.
