

# Genesis

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# Genesis

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# Lesson 1: Introduction to the Book of Genesis

The book of Genesis is the first of the sixty-six books that make up the Protestant Bible. It is the first of the five books of Moses (also known as the books of the Law or the Pentateuch<sup>1</sup>). It derives its name from the Septuagint, a 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, which entitled it *genesis*, the Greek word for “beginning,” “origin,” or “source.”<sup>2</sup> Genesis is the book of beginnings or origins. It tells us of the beginning/origin of the universe, animals, mankind, sin, death, the nation of Israel, etc.

In the book of Genesis, we read of Creation (chps. 1-2), the Fall (chp. 3), the story of Cain & Abel (chp. 4), Noah, the ark, and the Flood (chps. 6-9), the Tower of Babel (chp. 11), the call of Abraham (chp. 12), the birth of Ishmael (chp. 16), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (chp. 19), the offering of Isaac (chp. 22), Esau’s selling of his birthright (chp. 25), Jacob’s stealing his father’s blessing (chp. 27), Jacob’s wrestling with God (chp. 32), the selling of Joseph into slavery (chp. 37), Joseph’s flight from Potiphar’s wife and subsequent unjust imprisonment (chp. 39), Joseph’s interpreting of Pharaoh’s dream and subsequent release from prison and promotion by Pharaoh (chp. 41), and Joseph’s reunion with his brothers (chp. 45).

## Authorship

The human author of the book of Genesis was Moses. Moses wrote more of the Old Testament (Genesis-Deuteronomy<sup>3</sup> and Psalm 90) than any other human writer. Moses was uniquely prepared and qualified to write Genesis-Deuteronomy.<sup>4</sup> Besides internal evidence (evidence within the book of Genesis), external evidence (evidence outside the book of Genesis) also points to Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (and, thus, Genesis). None other than Jesus Christ Himself affirmed that Moses wrote the Law (see Matthew 8:4, 19:7-8, Mark 7:10, 12:26, Luke 16:29, 31, 24:44, John 5:46, and 7:19). Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was virtually unquestioned until the last few centuries, when theological liberals began to teach the so-called “documentary

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<sup>1</sup> The word Pentateuch literally means “five-volumed book.” It comes from the Greek words *penta*, meaning “five” and *teuchos*, meaning “scroll.”

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Hebrew title is *bereshith* (“in the beginning”), the first word of the book in the Hebrew Old Testament. Ancient books were often named according to the first words of the book.

<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely that Moses wrote the final chapter of the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 34), seeing it records his death.

<sup>4</sup> “Judging therefore by the internal evidence of the Pentateuchal text, we are driven to the conclusion that the author must have been originally a resident of Egypt (not Palestine) [notice Genesis 13:10 in this regard], a contemporary eyewitness of the exodus and wilderness wandering, and possessed of a very high degree of education, learning, and literary skill. No one else conforms to these qualifications as closely as Moses the son of Amram” (Archer, p. 115).

hypothesis,” “the theory that the Pentateuch was a compilation of selections from several different written documents [these documents were labeled J, E, D, and P] composed at different places and times over a period of five centuries, long after Moses” (Archer, pp. 83-84).<sup>5</sup> This theory has been soundly refuted by conservative scholars.<sup>6</sup>

## Date

Among the few writers who suggest a date of writing for the book of Genesis, some (such as Archer, p. 122) suggest that it was written during the forty years Moses and the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness (i.e., desert) of Sinai (1447-1407 B.C.).<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, Benware (p. 26) assigns a date of 1425 B.C. Others (such as Geisler, p. 38) suggest it was written during the first 40 years of Moses’ life, while he was still in Egypt (1527-1487 B.C.).

## Purpose

Genesis is historical in nature.<sup>8</sup> Rather than seeking to be exhaustive, the Jewish historians were selective in their retelling of history, including only those items that fit their purpose in writing and in proportions consistent with their purpose.<sup>9</sup> With this fact in mind, the purpose for the book of Genesis seems to be to inform the Jews of their origin as a people. Accordingly, the overwhelming majority of the book (chapters 12-50) focuses on the Jews in particular.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hamilton (1:17) speaks of a so-called “Rainbow Bible,” which color codes the books of Genesis-Numbers according to three alleged different underlying documents (one color for J, one for E, and one for P), aptly commenting: “To some this project will be helpful. To others it will be dismissed as nothing more than an exercise in coloring.”

<sup>6</sup> “The modern theories which reject Mosaic authorship put more of a strain upon human credulity than can reasonably be borne” (Archer, p. 123).

<sup>7</sup> Moses’ life can be neatly divided into three 40-year segments: 1) 40 years in Egypt (1527-1487 B.C.); 2) 40 years in Midian (1487-1447 B.C.); and 3) 40 years in the wilderness (1447-1407 B.C.). The dates are those of Geisler (p. 38).

<sup>8</sup> One key distinction that must be made when interpreting an historical book is determining what is descriptive (describing what they did) and what is prescriptive (prescribing what we must also do).

<sup>9</sup> What F. Duane Lindsey (“Judges” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, OT vol., p. 373) calls “theological selective history.” Commenting on Genesis 1, Hamilton (1:55) states: “The writer’s concerns, then, were theological and historical—what happened, and why, and so what.”

<sup>10</sup> Hamilton (1:10-11) alludes to this fact when he states: “It is hardly accidental that four-fifths of Genesis (chs. 12-50) describes the history of only four generations (Abraham to Joseph), while one-fifth of Genesis (chs. 1-11) describes the history of twenty generations (Adam to Abraham). Why is Genesis preoccupied maximally with the four generations, but only

## Theme

Crucial to understanding the book of Genesis is the Abrahamic covenant (an unconditional covenant), initiated by God in chapter 15. This covenant (in part or in whole) is reiterated several times throughout the book, showing that in spite of the unfaithfulness of the patriarchs, God would remain faithful to His promise. “The point is frequently made throughout these chapters of Genesis [chps. 12-36] that the selection of these patriarchs is not based on their behavior. They are not chosen because they are good. They are chosen on the basis of God’s sovereign will. Even when they are guilty of highly unethical behavior, God remains true to his promise” (Hamilton, 1:43).<sup>11</sup> The theme of Genesis is the faithfulness of God to His promises contained in the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>12</sup>

## Structure

That Genesis is a unified whole is seen by a linguistic thread tying it together, the expression “these are the generations of ...” (see 2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 27, 25:12, 19, 36:1, 9, and 37:2; cf. Numbers 3:1 and Ruth 4:18).<sup>13</sup> This Hebrew phrase introduces either a genealogy (family tree) or a narration of the history of a particular individual and his family.<sup>14</sup> By studying this linguistic thread, one can clearly see Moses

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minimally with the first twenty generations? As an extension of this point, why does the Creation story, certainly an indispensable part of Genesis and all of Scripture for that matter, receive only two chapters, while the Abraham story is allotted thirteen chapters and part of two others? Why is the account of the ‘Fall’ limited to one chapter, while the Joseph narrative occupies the last third of Genesis?”

<sup>11</sup> “Genesis also provides us with a grand revelation of God’s faithfulness as it recounts God’s fidelity over and over again in the lives of the patriarchs. We see that God remains faithful even when the people to whom the promises are made become the greatest threat to the fulfillment of the promise. Such is God’s faithfulness that the sinful, disordered lives of the promise-bearers can’t abort the promises” (Hughes, pp. 16-17). “God will demonstrate again and again his ability to overcome obstacles and resolve jeopardy as he fulfills promises and provides what is necessary for the covenant to move forward” (Walton, *Genesis*, p. 398). “But while the reader may grimace with each blunder by the patriarchs and wince at each threat to the family, the tension is always surmounted by the realization that God will somehow and in timely fashion graciously propel the family, hence the promises, forward” (Mathews, 2:73).

<sup>12</sup> This theme may explain why Genesis seems to overlook the sins of the patriarchs. As B. S. Childs (quoted in Hamilton, 1:49) states: “It is astonishing to see the extent to which the ethical difficulties of the Genesis story are completely disregarded. The narrative is read to illustrate something entirely different, namely the faithfulness of God.”

<sup>13</sup> M. H. Woudstra (quoted in Ross, p. 74) calls this expression “the very fabric around which the whole of Genesis has been constructed.”

<sup>14</sup> Throughout Genesis, the non-chosen line, though usually dealt with first, is dispensed with relatively briefly and with a simple genealogy (e.g., Ishmael in 25:12-18 and Esau in 36:1-43).

drawing a line from Adam (5:1) [including Seth] to Noah (6:9) to Shem (11:10) to Terah (11:27) [including Abraham] to Isaac (25:19) and to Jacob (37:2).

Genesis can be subdivided in various ways. Besides subdividing it into sections based on the linguistic thread described in the previous paragraph (the way Ross structures the book), a few other subdivisions are as follows:

1. Geographical/Setting
  - ◆ Babylonia (chapters 1-11)
  - ◆ Palestine (chapters 12-36)
  - ◆ Egypt (chapters 37-50)
2. Two-fold division
  - ◆ Primeval (or pre-patriarchal) history (chapters 1-11<sup>15</sup>): approximately 2,000 years  
4 events: Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the Tower of Babel
  - ◆ Patriarchal history (chapters 12-50): approximately 300 years  
4 individuals: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph
3. Three-fold division (Hamilton, 1:11)
  - ◆ Generation (chapters 1-2)
  - ◆ Degeneration (chapters 3-11)
  - ◆ Regeneration (chapters 12-50)

The following outline is taken from Benware (p. 27):

- I. God's Dealings with Mankind in General (chapters 1-11)
  - A. The Creation (chapters 1-2)
  - B. The Fall of Man (chapters 3-5)
  - C. The Flood (chapters 6-9)
  - D. The Nations (chapters 10-11)
- II. God's Dealings with the Nation of Israel (chapters 12-50)
  - A. Abraham (chapters 12-23)
  - B. Isaac (chapters 24-26)
  - C. Jacob (chapters 27-36)
  - D. Joseph (chapters 37-50)

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By contrast, the chosen line is usually dealt with much more extensively with a lengthy narration.

<sup>15</sup> Geisler (p. 40) subdivides chapters 1-11 into the following four-fold division: creation of man (chapters 1-2); corruption of man (chapters 3-5); destruction of man (chapters 6-9); and dispersion of man (chapters 10-11).

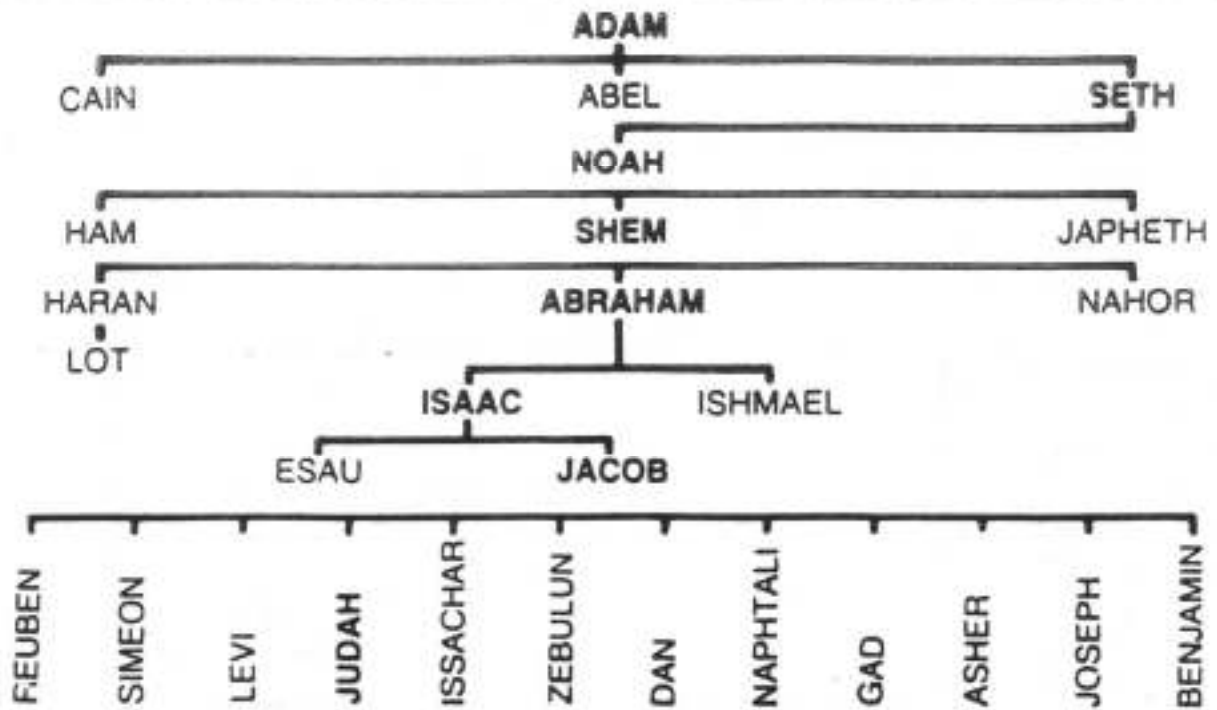
The following chart is taken from page 7 of Egner:

	Creation	Fall	Flood	Babel	Abraham	Isaac	Jacob	Joseph	
	1	2/3	5/6	9/10/11	12	25/25	26/27	36/37	50
	Chapters 1-11				Chapters 12-50				
	Four Beginning Events				Four Patriarchal Leaders				
	The Entire Race				Abraham and His Family				
	1/5 of Genesis				4/5 of Genesis				
	2000 + Years				193 Years			93 Years	
	Fertile Crescent				Palestine			Egypt	

### Some Outstanding Features of Genesis

1. Genesis covers more time than any other book in the Bible (approximately 2,300 years). In fact, it spans more time than all the other 65 books of the Bible combined (approximately 1,900 years).
2. Perhaps more than any other book, Genesis clashes with secular science, particularly in its early chapters. Accordingly, it has been a prime target of theological liberals.
3. Genesis paints a vivid picture of human sinfulness, recording such sins as murder, incest, rape, polygamy, etc. This dark backdrop serves as a canvass upon which the holiness, mercy, and faithfulness of God shines all the more brilliantly.
4. Genesis is quoted 60 times in the New Testament in 17 different books (Benware, p. 28). According to a source cited by Hamilton (1:72), there are 238 quotations from or allusions to Genesis in the New Testament.
5. Genesis traces the lineage of Christ from Adam to Perez (cf. Matthew 1:1-3 and Luke 3:33-38). The following chart is from p. 31 of Egner:

## The Lineage of Jesus Christ in Genesis





## Lesson 2: Genesis 1:1-2:3

This section of Scripture is foundational to knowing who God is (infinite Creator), who we are (finite creature), and the relationship between the two (the Creator/creature distinction, the infinite gap between God's being and man's being).

Genesis 1:1-2:3 has been called the prologue to the book of Genesis. Within this prologue, one may discern an introduction (1:1-2), body (1:3-31), and conclusion (2:1-3), the body consisting of the six days of Creation: day one (1:3-5), day two (1:6-8), day three (1:9-13), day four (1:14-19), day five (1:20-23), and day six (1:24-31). Each of the six days are introduced with the words, "And God said" and concluded with the words, "And the evening and the morning were the [x] day," with x being the particular day referred to.

This section of Scripture flies in the face of secular science. While secular science seeks to explain the origin of the universe through evolution, the Scriptures explain it through creationism.<sup>16</sup> All things have been created by the spoken word of God (1:3, 9, 11, 14, and 24; cf. Psalm 33:6-9 and Hebrews 11:3). One's view of the origin of the universe is a matter of faith — either faith in God, taking Him at His Word (see Hebrews 11:3), or faith in modern science.<sup>17</sup>

A "face value" reading of Genesis 1 leads one to believe that God created the universe in six literal, 24-hour days<sup>18</sup> apart from any intermediate process, such as evolution.

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<sup>16</sup>Christians are indebted to the writings of such men as Henry Morris and John Whitcomb and the efforts of such organizations as Answers in Genesis and the Institute for Creation Research for their scholarly defense of the creationist position, both from a scientific and theological perspective.

<sup>17</sup> How much faith does it take to believe in evolution? According to evolutionist Julian Huxley (cited in Geisler, p. 44), the mathematical odds of evolution occurring are 1 followed by three million zeroes to 1! Malcolm Muggeridge (quoted in Hughes, p. 19) states: "I myself am convinced that the theory of evolution, especially to the extent to which it has been applied, will be one of the greatest jokes in the history books of the future. Posterity will marvel that so very flimsy and dubious an hypothesis could be accepted with the incredible credulity it has."

<sup>18</sup> Support for the position that the days of creation were literal, 24-hour days include the following: 1) This is the position most in keeping with a normal reading of the text; 2) Each day is described in terms of an evening and a morning, and every time these two words are used in the Old Testament to describe a day, they are used to describe a literal, 24-hour day; and 3) When God institutes the Sabbath Day (a literal, 24-hour day) in Exodus 20:8-11 (cf. Exodus 31:12-17), He bases it on day seven of the creation week, leading one to conclude that the days of creation, like the Sabbath Day, were literal, 24-hour days. "The burden of proof, however, is on those who do not attribute to [day] in Gen. 1 its normal and most common interpretation, especially when [day] is always described as being composed of an evening and a morning" (Hamilton, 1:53).

However, some have sought a compromise between the account of Genesis 1 and the findings of modern science<sup>19</sup> by advocating one or more of the following theories:

- ◆ “Theistic Evolution” or “Progressive Creationism.” This is the belief that God used evolution as the means by which He created the universe.
- ◆ The “Gap Theory” or the “Ruin-Restoration Theory.” This is the belief that there was a large gap of time between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2, during which Satan fell. According to this theory, the perfect creation of Genesis 1:1 was marred (translating Genesis 1:2: “the earth became formless and void”) by the fall of Satan and, thus, had to be re-created (Genesis 1:3f). Surprisingly, this theory made its way into fundamental circles by its inclusion in the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909).
- ◆ The “Day-Age Theory.” This is the belief that the six days of Creation are not literal, 24-hour days, but are six geological ages.
- ◆ The “Revelatory Day Theory.” This is the belief that the six days are not describing the days of Creation, but the days during which God revealed the events of Creation to Moses. However, notice the words of Exodus 20:11: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth.”

## **1:1-2**

The Bible does not begin by seeking to prove God’s existence; It assumes it.<sup>20</sup> “In the beginning” (1:1; cf. John 1:1), i.e., the beginning of time<sup>21</sup> the God who has always been created<sup>22</sup> “the heaven<sup>23</sup> and the earth” (1:1; cf. Genesis 2:4, Exodus 20:11, Nehemiah

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<sup>19</sup> “In the last three decades [this statement was written in 1975] the pressure of ‘scientific opinion’ has increased to the point that some biblical scholars have made sweeping concessions, abandoning a literal interpretation of the text ....” (Davis, p. 37). “Analysis of the alternatives to the literal day theory make it apparent that the major criticism of that theory is not linguistic or philological. These alternatives have been formed in response to the pressure of scientific opinions” (ibid., p. 54). “... [I]t is extremely difficult to conclude that anything other than a twenty-four-hour day was intended. It is not the text that causes people to think otherwise, only the demands of trying to harmonize with modern science” (Walton, *Genesis*, p. 81).

<sup>20</sup> “The Bible offers no philosophical argument for the existence of God; it assumes His existence and views everything in the light of that assumption” (Davis, p. 42).

<sup>21</sup> An oft-debated point amongst creationists and evolutionists is the age of the earth. Based on the genealogies in Genesis 5 & 11, Archbishop James Ussher suggested a date for Creation of 4004 B.C. However, because there are some gaps in these genealogies, this date is unlikely. Nevertheless, the earth is likely thousands (tens of thousands at most) years old, not millions of years old, as evolutionists claim. See John Whitcomb’s *The Early Earth* (1972).

<sup>22</sup> The Hebrew verb translated “created” in Genesis 1:1 is a verb whose subject is always God; the Bible never uses this verb to describe what any other person does.

9:6, and Jeremiah 32:17), i.e., the universe<sup>24</sup> (all that is not God; there is God, and there is everything else). The opening verse of the Bible (1:1) does away with the falsehoods of atheism (the belief that there is no God), polytheism (the belief that there are many gods), and pantheism (the belief that everything is God). The particular name for God Moses uses in 1:1 is Elohim<sup>25</sup>, the name that stresses God's strength/power/might. God's greatness is seen throughout this passage: His eternity (He existed before time began, in eternity past, 1:1); His sovereignty (His commands are obeyed, 1:3, 9, 11, 14-15, and 24; He names things, 1:5, 8, and 10); and His omnipotence (He creates things *ex nihilo*, i.e., "out of nothing" simply by speaking the word; cf. Jeremiah 32:17 and Hebrews 11:3). Genesis 1:1 is more or less a summary statement of the entire passage, with the rest of the passage filling in the details. When God first created the universe, it was "without form, and void" (1:2), i.e., uninhabitable (cf. Isaiah 45:18). All three persons of the Godhead played a role in Creation.<sup>26</sup> Genesis 1:2 says that God the Spirit "moved upon the face of the waters." The Hebrew verb is used in Deuteronomy 32:11 of a mother eagle's care for her young ("fluttereth"). The verb can also be translated "hover."

### **1:3-5 (Day 1: creation of light)**

While some balk at the fact that God creates light on day one, while not creating the sun and the moon until day four, this is "no biggie" for God. As mentioned previously, the fact that God names (in 1:5) is indicative of His sovereignty over what He creates.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The Bible speaks of a "third heaven" (the abode of God) in 2 Corinthians 12:2. It is, therefore, assumed that there is a first heaven and a second heaven, with the first being the atmospheric heaven (what is visible by day) and the second being the astral heaven (what is visible by night). The "heavens" (Genesis 2:1) created by God in the beginning likely included the first two, if not all three.

<sup>24</sup> "The heaven and the earth" is a merism (a figure of speech expressing totality) for the universe (cf. Psalm 89:11 and Isaiah 44:24). Moses had to resort to such a device because the Hebrew language had no one word for universe (C. F. Kiel, cited in Ross, p. 721).

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Elohim is a plural (as evidenced by its -im ending), though the verb ("created") is in the singular. Though it is tantalizing to see in this the doctrine of the trinity of God (one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), it is more likely signifying the greatness of God (a plural of majesty or intensity).

<sup>26</sup> God the Father was the "architect" of Creation (Genesis 1:1, 1 Corinthians 8:6). God the Son was the "builder" (John 1:3, 10, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 1:2). God the Holy Spirit was the "construction worker" (Genesis 1:2). The Father was the source (from the Father), the Son was the channel (through the Son), and the Spirit was the active agent (by the Spirit).

<sup>27</sup> "The act of naming in the ancient Near East was an act of sovereign dominion" (Ross, pp. 108-109); "... [I]n the ancient oriental view the act of giving a name meant, above all, the exercise of a sovereign right. Thus the naming of this and all subsequent creative works once more

The fact that each of the days of creation are spoken of in terms of evening and morning, rather than vice versa, may be indicative of the Hebrew day lasting from one sundown to the next.

### **1:6-8 (Day 2: creation of the expanse or firmament)**

On the second day of Creation, God created the atmospheric heaven (1:8; cf. footnote 23), which the KJV calls the “firmament.”<sup>28</sup> “Expanse” is a good alternative translation, as the Hebrew word describes something that is spread out (cf. Psalm 104:2, 136:6, Isaiah 42:5, and 44:24). The expanse separated the waters into those below it and those above it (1:6-7). There is much speculation as to the precise identity of the waters above the expanse (cf. Psalm 148:4). Some identify them as the clouds, while others suggest that they were a vapor canopy suspended above the earth, which created a greenhouse effect (accounting, in part, for the longevity of life prior to the Flood) and, when released at the Flood (Genesis 7:11), accounted for much of the mass of water required to submerge the earth’s landscape.<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note that day two is the only day about which God does not say it was “good.” Ross (p. 109) is probably correct in suggesting that the reason for this is that God’s work with the water was not yet completed until the next day, day three; it is not until the gathering of the waters below the expanse into seas on day three that God makes His pronouncement of “good” (see 1:9-10).

### **1:9-13 (Day 3: creation of the seas, dry land, plants & trees)**

Apparently, prior to day three, all of the earth’s land mass was submerged in the waters below the expanse. On day three, God caused these waters to recede, forming seas and causing the dry land to appear (1:9-10). Once the dry land appeared, God created the plants and trees also on day three (1:11-12). That the plants and trees God created were seed-bearing and fruit-bearing, respectively, points to the fact that the things God created were created mature, with the appearance of age.

### **1:14-19 (Day 4: creation of the sun, moon, and stars)**

Many authors have pointed out an interesting correspondence between the days of creation (day one corresponding to day four; day two to day five; and day three to day six). When first created, the universe was formless and empty (“without form, and void” in 1:2). Through the days of creation, God formed (days 1-3) and filled (days 4-6) the universe He created.<sup>30</sup> The following chart is from Egner (p. 9):

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expresses graphically God’s claim of lordship over the creatures” (Gerhard Von Rad, quoted in Davis, p. 62).

<sup>28</sup> “Firmament” is derived from the Latin Vulgate’s translation of this word, *firmamentum*, meaning something made solid (Ross, p. 109).

<sup>29</sup> See *The Genesis Flood* by Henry Morris & John Whitcomb (1961).

<sup>30</sup> Hamilton (1:55) calls days 1-3 days of preparation and days 4-6 days of population.

### The Creative Days of Genesis

DAY	FORMING	DAY	FILLING
1	Light	4	Sun, Moon, Stars
2	Firmament	5	Sea Life, Birds
3	Land, Sea, Plants	6	Land Life, Man

"And He rested on the seventh day..."

On day four, God created permanent (to replace the temporary light source of days one-three) light sources to light the earth (1:15 and 17) by day (the sun, 1:16) and by night (the moon, 1:16), as well as to separate the day/light from the night/darkness (1:14 and 18), to be for signs<sup>31</sup> (1:14), to bring about the various seasons (1:14), and to mark days and years (1:14). In a day when worship of the sun, moon, and stars was prevalent, the biblical declaration that God created these heavenly bodies is intended to turn one's focus away from worship of the created to worship of the Creator.<sup>32</sup>

#### **1:20-23 (Day 5: creation of fish & fowl/aquatic & aerial creatures)**

On day five, God populated the seas and the expanse that He had prepared on days three and two, respectively. The aquatic creatures included "the great sea creatures" (1:21, KJV marginal note; NASB: "great sea monsters"). The precise translation of the Hebrew word, used elsewhere in Job 7:12, Psalm 74:13, 148:7, and Isaiah 27:1, is subject to much speculation (whales? marine dinosaurs? Loch Ness monsters?). For the first time, God pronounces a blessing on what He has created, the blessing amounting to the capacity to procreate (1:22; cf. 1:28).

#### **1:24-31 (Day 6: creation of land animals and man)**

After creating the land animals (1:24-25), God culminated the days of Creation by creating His consummate creature, man.<sup>33</sup> What made man unique from the rest of the

<sup>31</sup> The fact that God created the sun and the moon to "be for signs" is not biblical justification for astrology. "Modern astrologers have often appealed to verse 14 to justify their enterprise. The signs of verse 14, however, relate to faith (Ps 8, 19; Rom 1:14-20), weather (Matt 16:2, 3), prophecy (Matt 2:2; Luke 21:25), and judgment (Joel 2:30, 31; Matt 24:29). They are also a means of getting bearings for long journeys" (Davis, p. 65).

<sup>32</sup> Commenting on 1:16, Sailhamer (p. 34) states: "... [v. 16] is a remark directed to the reader drawing out the significance of that which has previously been recounted: 'So God [and not anyone else] made the lights and put them into the sky' (pers. tr.). Behind this narrative, in other words, is a concern on the part of the author to emphasize that God alone created the lights of the heavens, and thus no one else is to be given the glory and honor due only to him."

<sup>33</sup> Calvin (1:91-92) attributes significance to the difference between the way God speaks when creating all other creatures (see 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14-15, 20, and 24) and the way He speaks when

creatures God created was the fact that man was created in God's image/likeness (1:26-27; cf. 5:1). What this includes is variously understood.<sup>34</sup> According to Rolland McCune, the image includes man's personal (self-consciousness, self-determination, etc.), moral (conscience), and spiritual (capacity to fellowship with God, worship God, and possess eternal life) resemblance to God; man is a finite replica of the infinite God. Due to the Fall, this image has been defaced, but not erased; diminished, but not destroyed (see Genesis 9:6, 1 Corinthians 11:7, and James 3:9). It is restored via the process of salvation, as believers are conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18, and Colossians 3:10), Who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15). The plurals ("us," "our," and "our"; cf. 3:22, 11:7, and Isaiah 6:8) in 1:26 are variously understood. In light of Deuteronomy 6:4 ("the LORD our God is one LORD"), polytheism (many gods) is ruled out. To some, they are intended to communicate the trinity of God. To others, as with Elohim in 1:1 (see comments on this verse), the plurals here are plurals of majesty or intensity.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the wickedness God saw in the days of Noah (6:5), what He saw at the end of six days of creating was "very good" (1:31).

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creating man (see 1:26), commenting: "Hitherto God has been introduced simply as *commanding*; now, when he approaches the most excellent of all his works, he enters into *consultation*. God certainly might here command by his bare word what he wished to be done: but he chose to give this tribute to the excellency of man, that he would, in a manner, enter into consultation concerning his creation. This is the highest honour with which he has dignified us; to a due regard for which, Moses, by this mode of speaking, would excite our minds. ... so now, for the purpose of commending to our attention the dignity of our nature, he, in taking counsel concerning the creation of man, testifies that he is about to undertake something great and wonderful."

<sup>34</sup> Davis (p. 81) says the image consists of the capacity for self-consciousness, speech, and moral discernment. Ross (p. 112) says the image consists of spiritual life, ethical and moral sensitivities, conscience, and the capacity to represent God. Hamilton (1:137) "punts," stating: "It is clear that v. 26 is not interested in defining what is the image of God in man. The verse simply states the fact ...."

<sup>35</sup> Even if they are viewed as plurals of majesty or intensity, they certainly still allow for the doctrine of the trinity. As Ross (p. 112) states: "These plurals do not explicitly refer to the trinity of the Godhead but do allow for that doctrine's development through the process of progressive revelation."

### **2:1-3**

Having completed His work<sup>36</sup> of creating<sup>37</sup> (2:1-2a), God rested (2:2b). God did not rest because He was tired; God doesn't get tired (Isaiah 40:28). The idea of resting is more the idea of ceasing from labor. Ross (p. 114) describes it as the enjoyment of accomplishment, the celebration of completion. Because the seventh day was the day God ceased from His work of creating, it became a special day, one set apart by God (2:3). The setting apart of this day later became a key element in the Mosaic Law (see Exodus 20:8-11 and 31:14-17).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The Hebrew word translated “work” in 2:2 is an interesting one. “The OT has two words for ‘labor’ .... The second word emphasizes labor that is raw and unskilled. The first—and the one used here—designates skilled labor, work that is performed by a craftsman or an artisan. Such is the measure of the finesse and professional skills of God’s work” (Hamilton, 1:142).

<sup>37</sup> God did not cease working at the end of the Creation week. See 3:21, as well as Christ’s words in John 5:17 (“My Father worketh hitherto”). God’s work of sustaining His creation, His work of providence, and His work of redemption continue to this day.

<sup>38</sup> The word “Sabbath” comes from the Hebrew verb *shabat*, meaning “to rest.”

## Lesson 3: Genesis 2:4-25

Genesis 2:4-25 begins the first of the eleven “these are the generations of” sections in the book of Genesis (see under “Structure” in Lesson 1). In this section, which continues through the end of chapter four, Moses records “the generations of the heavens and the earth” (2:4). Moses wants to inform the reader what became of the universe that God created, recording the people, places, events, etc. essential to the development of his purpose and theme. This includes the creation of the first man, Adam (2:7), his placement in the Garden of Eden (2:8 and 15), the command not to eat from one of the trees in the Garden (2:16-17), the creation of the first woman, Eve (2:18f), the Fall and its consequences (chp. 3), etc.

While in 1:1-2:3, Moses records the creation of the entire universe (1:1) and all its particulars (1:3-31), in 2:4-25 He returns to the creation of man on day six (cf. 1:26-30), the only thing created in God’s image (1:26-27), giving his audience more crucial details surrounding this momentous event.

### **2:4**

Of particular interest in this verse is the fact that, for the first time, Moses calls God something other than Elohim (as he did thirty-five times in 1:1-2:3) by calling Him “the LORD God.” In fact, throughout 2:4-3:25, “LORD God” is the only name Moses gives to God.<sup>39</sup> While “God” is the Hebrew name for God, Elohim (for the significance of this name, see comments on 1:1), “LORD” is the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh.<sup>40</sup> Yahweh is the most common Hebrew name for God (used over 5,000 times in the OT). It emphasizes God’s self-existence, eternity, and immutability (see Exodus 3:14, where Yahweh is translated “I AM”). Yahweh is God’s personal name (Psalm 83:18 and Isaiah 42:8a).

### **2:5-6**

These verses are somewhat perplexing. On the surface, they seem to contradict 1:11-12 (while 2:5-6 speaks of vegetation that did not appear until after man was created<sup>41</sup>, 1:11-12 speaks of vegetation that was created on day three, three days prior to the creation of man). Perhaps the best solution is to view the vegetation spoken of in these verses as different in type from the vegetation spoken of in 1:11-12 (notice, for example,

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<sup>39</sup> When Elohim (“God”) by itself is used in 3:1-5, Moses is merely recording the words of Satan and Eve.

<sup>40</sup> The third Hebrew name for God is Adonai, “Lord.” In order to distinguish the three names, the KJV translates Elohim as “God,” Yahweh as “LORD,” and Adonai as “Lord.” When Adonai and Yahweh are used together, the KJV translates “Lord [Adonai] GOD [Yahweh].”

<sup>41</sup> “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, NASB).



that the vegetation spoken of in these verses is described as “of the field,” while the vegetation spoken of in 1:11-12 is not). Hamilton (1:154) suggests that the vegetation spoken of in 1:11-12 was vegetation that was self-reproducing, while the vegetation spoken of in these verses was the type that required human cultivation to survive. Thus, God did not bring this second type of vegetation into existence until He created a cultivator, man (2:7). Until the advent of rain at the time of the Flood, God watered the earth by an underground water source of some kind. Notice that according to verse 5 it is God, not “Mother Nature,” who sends rain.

## **2:7**

While 1:27 simply states the fact that God created man, this verse tells how He did it. God formed<sup>42</sup> man’s material part “of the dust of the ground” (cf. 3:19 and 23).<sup>43</sup> God formed man’s immaterial part by a divine inbreathing (“breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”; cf. 7:22). As a result of this formation and animation (Hamilton, 1:156), man “became a living soul.” While the Hebrew words Moses uses to describe man (“living soul”) are also used of animals (in 1:20, 21, 24, and 2:19)<sup>44</sup>, what distinguishes man from animals is the fact that only man was created in the image of God (1:26-27). Some believe that the divine inbreathing described in this verse was the way God imparted His image to man.

## **2:8**

While in verse 7 God is seen as a potter, here in verse 8 He is seen as a planter (Hamilton, 1:161), “planting” a garden in a region known as Eden<sup>45</sup> and placing man in it. Though there is much speculation as to the precise location of this garden, Davis (p. 83) is probably correct when he states: “It is futile, however, to try to pinpoint the garden’s location; the area was probably altered greatly first by God’s curse upon the earth and then by the great flood of Noah.” Based on its very name (Eden is the transliteration of a Hebrew word that describes something delightful), Eden was undoubtedly a beautiful place.

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<sup>42</sup> The Hebrew verb translated “formed” means to mold or to shape (Davis, p. 76). It is used elsewhere in the Old Testament of a potter (Isaiah 29:16 and Jeremiah 18:2-6) and of a metalsmith (Isaiah 44:12). Ross (p. 122) rightly remarks: “Humankind is a work of art.”

<sup>43</sup> Unknown to the English reader is the fact that the Hebrew words for “man” (*adam*) and “ground” (*adamah*) are similar in sound. Perhaps Moses is making use of the literary device known as “assonance,” the use of similar sounding words in close proximity to one another for literary effect.

<sup>44</sup> Similarly, both man (2:7) and animals (2:19) are spoken of as being created from the ground.

<sup>45</sup> Notice that Moses speaks of Eden both as the name of the garden (2:15 and 3:23-24) and as the name of the region in which the garden was located (2:8, 10, and 4:16).

## **2:9-14**

In these verses, Moses records some of the features of the Garden of Eden. On day three (1:11-12), God created fruit trees. Two of these trees were placed in the Garden of Eden and given supernatural properties: the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (v. 9). Had it not been for the Fall, the fruit from the tree of life apparently would have been the means by which God would have perpetuated man's earthly existence eternally (cf. 3:22 and Revelation 2:7, and 22:2 and 14). In verses 10-14, Moses names four rivers connected to the river that flowed out of the Garden of Eden. Two of these rivers are known to us today, the Tigris (KJV "Hiddekel") and the Euphrates (v. 14). The other two are unknown, the Pison (v. 11) and the Gihon (v. 13). Based on our knowledge of the locations of the Tigris and the Euphrates, it is likely that the Garden of Eden was located somewhere in the Persian Gulf region, perhaps in modern Iraq.

## **2:15-17**

Verse 15 resumes where verse 8 left off, giving a reason why God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden: "to dress it and to keep it." One implication of this verse is that work is not a consequence of the curse; rather, hard work is (3:17-19).<sup>46</sup> In verses 16-17, God gives man his first command, forbidding him to partake of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is interesting to note that when Satan makes reference to God's words in these verses (in the early part of chapter 3), he focuses exclusively on the prohibition (what man could not do: "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it," v. 17a), ignoring the provision (what man could do: "of every [other] tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat," v. 16b). The consequence for disobeying this command was death: "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"<sup>47</sup> (v. 17b). According to Hamilton (1:174), the point being made is that disobedience to this command would result in "the announcement of a death sentence by divine or royal decree." In other words, Moses is not necessarily implying that the death being spoken of would take place the moment the command was disobeyed, but rather that the pronouncement of the death sentence is what would take place the moment the command was disobeyed (so also Walton, *Genesis*, pp. 174-175). Another possibility is that the death and decay process began the moment the command was disobeyed. Yet another possibility is that the death being spoken of is spiritual death<sup>48</sup>,

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<sup>46</sup> Before the Fall, work was a "natural inclination"; after the Fall, it became a "deliberate intention" (David Hubbard, "Proverbs" in *The Communicator's Commentary*, p. 416).

<sup>47</sup> The Hebrew literally reads: "in the day of your eating from it dying you shall die" (Hamilton, 1:172), dying being reiterated for emphasis.

<sup>48</sup> The basic idea of death is separation. Ross (p. 125) comments: "The basic idea seems to be more of alienation or separation rather than cessation or annihilation." At physical death, the material and immaterial parts of man are separated (James 2:26). Spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1 and 5) is the separation of the sinner from God due to the sinner's sin (Isaiah 59:2). Eternal death is the permanent separation of the sinner from God in hell (Revelation 20:14-15; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9).

the separation of the sinner from God due to the sinner's sin. The moment Adam & Eve disobeyed the command, they were alienated from God (see 3:8).

## **2:18-24**

Moses now records the circumstances surrounding the creation of the first woman, Eve. For the first time, God gives a negative evaluation, declaring the solitude of Adam “not good” (v. 18; cf. “good” in 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25 and “very good” in 1:31). Based on this evaluation, God determined to “make [Adam] an help meet for him” (v. 18; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:9). Lest one think that the role of “help” is a demeaning one, consider the fact that the same Hebrew word is used of God Himself throughout the Old Testament (see Exodus 18:4, Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29, 1 Samuel 7:12, Psalm 20:2, 33:20, 46:1, 115:9-11, 124:8, and 146:5). As the man's helper, the woman would provide what was lacking in man, supplying what man in and of himself could not, i.e., without the woman, the man could not be complete. “Meet for him” literally means “corresponding to him.”<sup>49</sup> Eve was the only one who corresponded to Adam, because she was the only other being created in the image of God (“male and female” in 1:27). To drive this point home to Adam, God brought all the various species of land animals and birds to Adam<sup>50</sup> to be named<sup>51</sup> (vs. 19-20a), an exercise that apparently caused Adam to realize this deficiency (v. 20b). To remedy this deficiency, God anesthetized Adam with “a deep sleep” (v. 21; cf. 15:12), removed one of his ribs, and from it created<sup>52</sup> Eve (vs. 21-22). While God could have created Eve in the same manner He created Adam, it may very well be that He chose the manner He did in order to communicate the side-by-side nature of the husband-wife relationship.<sup>53</sup> The fact that God brought Eve to Adam (end of v. 22) may signify that God is the One who ultimately

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<sup>49</sup> Calvin (1:130) uses the word “counterpart” and Walton (*Genesis*, p. 177) the word “counterpartner.”

<sup>50</sup> The text does not tell us how God did this. However He did it, it was “no biggie” for Him. Both Hamilton (1:176) and Sailhamer (p. 48) are of the opinion that God specially created at least one specimen from each species for the occasion.

<sup>51</sup> As mentioned previously (see comments on 1:5, including footnote 27), the act of naming is indicative of sovereignty. Adam's sovereignty over the animals (cf. 1:28) is seen by the fact that he names them (2:19-20).

<sup>52</sup> The Hebrew verb translated “made” in verse 22 is an interesting one. It literally means “built.” Commenting on this verb, Hamilton (1:179) states: “The verb *built* by its very definition implies beauty, stability, and durability.”

<sup>53</sup> The famous commentator of centuries ago, Matthew Henry, has said: “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved” (p. 20 of volume 1 of his 6 volume commentary on the whole Bible).

brings a man and a woman together as husband and wife.<sup>54</sup> When Adam laid eyes on Eve, he gave an “exclamatory outburst” (Hamilton, 1:179), calling Eve “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (v. 23a). Signifying his functional superiority<sup>55</sup> to Eve, Adam was given the prerogative of naming her (v. 23b).<sup>56</sup> In verse 24, Moses makes a parenthetical statement regarding marriage. Marriage involves a leaving (“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother”), a cleaving (“and shall cleave unto his wife”), and a weaving (“and they shall be one flesh”; in every way: physiologically, psychologically, etc.). Several implications concerning marriage can be made from this verse: 1) marriage is intended to be heterosexual, not homosexual; 2) marriage is intended to be monogamous, not polygamous; and 3) marriage is intended to be permanent<sup>57</sup> (cf. Christ’s citing of this verse in Matthew 19:5//Mark 10:7-8).

## **2:25**

This verse serves as a bridge to the next section, the account of the Fall in chapter 3. The connection is made in at least two ways: 1) compare this verse with 3:7 and 2) another (cf. footnotes 43 and 56) use of assonance: “naked” in this verse is the Hebrew word *arummim*, while “subtil” in 3:1 is the Hebrew word *arum*.

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<sup>54</sup> “As with everything else thus far in Genesis, all of it is from God. Divine initiative is at the root of everything, as we see in the God-initiated verbs: ‘The LORD God *said*’ (v. 18), ‘the LORD God *formed*’ (v. 19), ‘the LORD God *caused*’ (v. 21), and ‘the LORD God ... *made*’ (v. 22, emphasis added throughout). In each case the Lord God ... takes the initiative to shape man and woman and their relationship. Everything here is directly from him” (Hughes, p. 57).

<sup>55</sup> In terms of essence, men and women are equal, both being in the image of God (1:27; cf. Galatians 3:28). In terms of function, however, man is over woman. The same dynamic is found within the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit being equal in essence, but unequal in function (1 Corinthians 11:3).

<sup>56</sup> As verse 7 (see footnote 43), so verse 23 is marked by assonance. Adam names Eve “Woman” (Hebrew *ishshah*) because she was taken out of man (Hebrew *ish*).

<sup>57</sup> According to Hamilton (1:181), the Hebrew verbs translated “leave” and “cleave” have covenantal overtones. Marriage is a covenant (Proverbs 2:17 and Malachi 2:14).

## Lesson 4: Genesis 3

Having told us about the creation of man (end of chapter 1 and most of chapter 2), Moses now tells us about the corruption of man (chapter 3). While Genesis 2 is paradise gained, Genesis 3 is paradise lost. Genesis 3 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible, for it tells us about one of the most significant events in history, the entrance of sin into the human race<sup>58</sup> through “the Fall.” The chapter can be divided into three sections: the temptation (verses 1-5), the sin (verse 6), and the consequences (verses 7-24).

### **Verses 1-5 (the temptation)**

Satan, already having fallen into sin (see footnote 58), was intent on taking man down with him.<sup>59</sup> In keeping with his deceptive nature (2 Corinthians 11:3, 14, and Revelation 12:9), Satan not only disguised his true identity, but did so by enlisting the services of a snake, a creature “more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made” (verse 1a). “It was probably because the serpent was more subtle than any other beast of the field that Satan decided to use it” (Davis, p. 87).<sup>60</sup> In what Davis (p. 89) calls “the most disastrous dialogue in the history of the human race,” Satan through this snake<sup>61</sup> tempts Eve (and Adam through Eve, 3:6) to disobey God’s command in 2:16-17 not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>62</sup> Satan begins

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<sup>58</sup> Genesis 3 records the entrance of sin into the human race, not the entrance of sin into the universe. The entrance of sin into the universe took place with the fall of Satan (recorded in Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-19), which took place sometime between the end of Genesis 1 (in Genesis 1:31 God pronounces everything “very good”) and the beginning of Genesis 3.

<sup>59</sup> Satan had already taken some of the angels with him (one third, according to Revelation 12:4). Just like misery, sin loves company (cf. Proverbs 1:10-14).

<sup>60</sup> “Since [Satan] required an instrument, he chose from among animals that which he saw would be most suitable for him” (Calvin, 1:140). “Satan perverted to his own deceitful purposes the gift which had been divinely imparted to the serpent” (ibid.). Because of Satan’s crafty nature, the Scriptures compare him both to a snake (cf. Revelation 12:9 and 20:2) and to a lion (1 Peter 5:8). In using a snake, Satan was using an animal that was like himself (cf. Matthew 10:16).

<sup>61</sup> This is one of two instances in Scripture where an animal speaks (the other is Balaam’s donkey in Numbers 22:28 and 30). It is interesting to note that Adam and Eve were led into sin by a snake, a creature they were given dominion over (Genesis 1:26, 28; cf. 2:19-20 and comments on).

<sup>62</sup> There is much speculation as to the anatomy of the snake prior to the Fall. Was it not the frightful-looking creature it is today (Eve shows no sign of alarm)? Did it walk on all fours (see 3:14)? Another area of speculation is whether or not Adam was at Eve’s side at the time of the temptation. Most say yes (due, for example, to the use of plural pronouns in verses 1-5). While

by questioning/casting doubt on God's words in 2:16-17 by asking, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (verse 1b). Satan is implying that it was wrong for God to place any restrictions on Adam and Eve. "It suggests that perhaps God was not being completely fair with Adam and Eve, despite the fact that He had granted them access to all the other trees" (Davis, p. 88).<sup>63</sup> Satan subtly maligns God's magnanimity by "placing the clause 'from any tree' at the end of the sentence rather than at the head as in 2:16, thereby robbing God's command of its nuance of liberality" (Mathews, 1:235). Many view Eve's answer (verses 2-3) to Satan's question (verse 1b) with suspicion. One, Eve omits the idea of "freely" found in 2:16. Two, Eve adds to the prohibition ("neither shall ye touch it," v. 3). And three, Eve takes the bite out of (no pun intended) the consequence, omitting the "surely" of 2:17. In verse 4, Satan responds to Eve by flatly contradicting God's words in 2:17b ("thou shalt surely die" in 2:17b vs. "ye shall not surely die" in 3:4).<sup>64</sup> Just as the command of 2:17 is emphatic (see footnote 47), so is Satan's denial.<sup>65</sup> Rightly did Jesus say of Satan in John 8:44: "... [T]here is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." Satan's first recorded lie was a denial of God's judgment. This same lie is believed by Satan's children today whenever they deny that hell does not await those who die impenitent. To support his denial in verse 4, Satan (as he so often does) attaches a reason, though a distorted one in verse 5: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods [or: as God, marginal note], knowing good and evil."<sup>66</sup> With these words, Satan once again (as in verse 1b) implies that God is improperly withholding something from Adam and Eve. Interestingly, the carrot that Satan dangles before Eve is the promise of becoming divine, the very issue over which he himself fell (see Isaiah 14:14). Satan's words in verse 5 were all the more deceptive because they comprised a half-truth: Adam and Eve's eyes were, indeed, opened (see 3:7) and, as a result, they did acquire a knowledge of good and evil they did not previously possess (see 3:22).<sup>67</sup> However, rather than becoming like God, they became like Satan, fallen.

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verse 6 does say that Adam was with Eve, the question is whether verse 6 takes place at the same time and place as verses 1-5 or at a different time and place.

<sup>63</sup> Hamilton (1:186) translates: "Indeed! To think that God said you are not to eat of any tree of the garden!"

<sup>64</sup> "It is interesting that three times the Word of the Lord is quoted, but never appropriately: once it is questioned in a misleading way, once it is paraphrased with major changes, and once it is flatly denied" (Ross, p. 132).

<sup>65</sup> A literal translation of the Hebrew original would be: "not—you shall surely die" (Ross, p. 135).

<sup>66</sup> Notice the clear contradiction: While God said in 2:17 that "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," Satan says in 3:5 that "in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened ..."

## **Verse 6 (the sin)**

This verse leaves some questions unanswered, such as: What kind of fruit was on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?<sup>68</sup> Was Adam with Eve the moment she ate the forbidden fruit? How soon after the creation of man did the Fall take place?<sup>69</sup> Many see in this verse an outworking of 1 John 2:16: “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food” = 1 John 2:16’s lust of the flesh; “and that it was pleasant to the eyes” = 1 John 2:16’s lust of the eyes; “and a tree to be desired to make one wise” = 1 John 2:16’s pride of life. It is apparent that the seed of lust (in the form of covetousness<sup>70</sup>) had taken root in Eve’s heart, leading to sin and death (James 1:15).<sup>71</sup> As mentioned previously (see footnote 59), sin loves company. As soon as Eve ate the forbidden fruit, she got Adam to do the same. What this verse does not make clear Paul in Romans 5:12-21 does, namely, that Adam’s sin was of much greater consequence than Eve’s. Because Adam was the representative head of the human race, his sin (called “original sin”) was imputed to (i.e., placed on the account of) each member of the human race, making every person a sinner positionally/judicially (Romans 5:12<sup>72</sup>; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).<sup>73</sup> Another notable difference between Eve’s sin and Adam’s sin is the fact that Eve was deceived into sinning (cf. 3:13), while Adam was not (1 Timothy 2:14).

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<sup>67</sup> While the knowledge of which Satan spoke amounted to omniscience (“good and evil” being a merism for all knowledge), the knowledge Adam and Eve received was an experiential (as opposed to a theoretical) knowledge of good and evil (Benware, p. 32). “This is hardly the knowledge for which they bargained” (Hamilton, 1:191).

<sup>68</sup> “Contrary to popular belief, the text does not specify what fruit the man and the woman ate. ... The time-honored tradition that identifies the fruit as an apple may have originated due to the common sound in Latin *malus*, ‘evil,’ and *malum*, ‘apple’” (Hamilton, 1:191).

<sup>69</sup> According to Ross (p. 143), the Fall took place almost immediately after Creation. According to Augustine, it took place six hours after (Calvin, 1:156). According to Jewish tradition, it took place seven years after (Davis, p. 91).

<sup>70</sup> The verbal forms of the Hebrew words translated “pleasant” and “desired” in Genesis 3:6 are used in Deuteronomy 5:21, which records the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment, the prohibition against coveting (“pleasant” in Genesis 3:6 = “desire” in Deuteronomy 5:21; “desired” in Genesis 3:6 = “covet” in Deuteronomy 5:21).

<sup>71</sup> The same progression of seeing, coveting, and taking is found in the story of Achan in Joshua 7 (see especially v. 21). In order to delay (and, hopefully, derail) this progression, barriers should be raised at each stage, beginning with the first one, seeing. Davis (p. 90) states in this regard: “What we look at is, after all, quite important. The proposition that an adult can gaze at anything is ludicrous and naïve, for gazing is too often followed by desiring and sinning.”

<sup>72</sup> “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.”

## **Verses 7-24 (the consequences)**

The moment Adam and Eve sinned, they died (as 2:17 warned). Physically, the death/decay process began. Spiritually, they experienced both a horizontal (from one another) and vertical (from God) separation. The former is seen in verse 7 (they hide from one another by making a cover<sup>74</sup>), the latter in verses 8-11 (they hide from God by taking cover). Before they sinned, Adam and Eve were unashamed (2:25). By sinning, they acquired an experiential knowledge of evil and the shame that went along with it.

Verse 8 is clearly anthropomorphic; an anthropomorphism (the Greek noun *anthropos*, “man” + the Greek noun *morphe*, “form, shape, appearance”) is a description of God in human terms for the sake of human understanding. The “voice [or: sound, marginal note] of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (verse 8) may have been a theophany (the Greek noun *theos*, “God” + the Greek verb *phaino*, “to appear”; a theophany is an appearance of God in physical form) of wind (the Hebrew noun translated “cool” may also be translated “wind” or “breeze”), perhaps even a forceful one. Like Jonah, Adam and Eve discovered that God is really good at hide-and-seek (cf. Job 34:21-22, Psalm 139:7-12, and Jeremiah 23:24).<sup>75</sup>

Through the sole use of questions in verses 9-13, God lets Adam and Eve incriminate themselves. When God confronts Adam about his sin (verses 9-11)<sup>76</sup>, Adam responds (verse 12) by blameshifting, not only blaming Eve, but even going so far as blaming God: “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me” (“God made me do it”; contra James 1:13). He certainly couldn’t blame his heredity or his environment (Ross, p. 130)! When God confronts Eve about her sin (verse 13a), she responds (verse 13b) in similar fashion: “The serpent beguiled me” (“the devil made me do it”). The victim mentality so prevalent today has been with us from the beginning.

In verses 14-19, God pronounces a series of curses: upon the snake (verse 14), Satan (verse 15), Eve (verse 16), and Adam (verses 17-19). The curse upon the snake most likely involved an anatomical alteration (verse 14’s “upon thy belly shalt thou go”; cf. footnote 62). Eating dust (“dust shalt thou eat,” verse 14), like crawling on one’s belly, signifies extreme humiliation (cf. Psalm 72:9, Isaiah 49:23, and Micah 7:17). The snake’s humiliation was to be perpetual (“all the days of thy life,” verse 14; cf. Isaiah

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<sup>73</sup> The moment Adam and Eve sinned, they also became sinners in nature and practice. Their sin nature was passed on to their children and subsequently to every succeeding generation through the procreative process (Psalm 51:5).

<sup>74</sup> The coverings Adam and Eve made for themselves were of fig leaves. Fig trees produce the largest leaves of any Palestinian tree (Hamilton, 1:191).

<sup>75</sup> Don’t miss the significance of the fact that Adam and Eve hide from God, while God seeks Adam and Eve. God seeks sinners (Luke 19:10); sinners don’t seek God (Romans 3:11); sinners hide from God.

<sup>76</sup> Notice that, though Eve sinned first, God called Adam to account first.



65:25). Verse 15 makes a subtle shift from one snake to another. Just as the Fall affected man's relationship with man (verse 7) and man's relationship with God (verses 8-11), so it affected man's relationship with Satan (verse 15). Genesis 3:15 is often referred to as the "protoevangelium," i.e., the first gospel (the Greek adjective *protos*, "first" + the Greek noun *euangelion*, "gospel"), for in it God promises that the seed of the woman (Christ; see Galatians 3:16-19), though suffering a crippling blow (the Cross) from the snake/Satan ("thou shalt bruise his heel"), would inflict a crushing blow (ironically, the Cross also; see Colossians 2:14-15 and Hebrews 2:14; cf. Romans 16:20a) on Satan ("it shall bruise thy head"). In the midst of ruin, God in His mercy promises redemption. The curse upon Eve (and subsequently upon all other women) involved increased pain in childbirth ("I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception," verse 16a), as well as contention in her relationship with her husband ("thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee," verse 16b). The Hebrew word translated "desire" can be understood in either a positive (as in Solomon 7:10) or negative (as in Genesis 4:7) sense. Most take it in the negative sense: "the wife's desire to overcome or gain the upper hand over her husband" (Sailhamer, p. 58). Due to the Fall, the wife's natural tendency became one of rebelling against her husband's authority ("thy desire shall be to thy husband")<sup>77</sup>, while the husband's natural tendency became one of dominating his wife ("he shall rule over thee"). The curse upon Adam (and subsequently upon all other humans) made work a difficult thing (cf. comments on 2:15) due to a change in the earth's topography (verses 17-19; cf. 5:29). What got Adam into trouble was listening to the voice of his wife (verse 17a), i.e., reversing roles with her ("hearkened unto" in verse 17 is a Hebrew idiom for obedience<sup>78</sup>). The curse upon creation will be reversed in the eschaton/end times (Romans 8:19-22). The end of verse 19 (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:20 and 12:7) is a reminder of man's mortality/that the wages of sin is death (Genesis 2:17, Romans 5:12 and 6:23a)/that physical death is a consequence of Adam's sin. Ross (p. 147) sums it up well by quipping: "So much for ambitions of divinity."

Verse 20 marks the second time (cf. 2:23) Adam names Eve. The name Eve means "living" or "life-giver" (Ross, p. 148). "... Adam's naming is an act of faith on his part. Though threatened by death Adam does not believe that he and his wife are to be the first and last beings of the human race" (Hamilton, 1:207); they will have children (verses 15-16).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> This is not to imply that the submission of the wife to her husband is a result of the curse. Such submission is pre-Fall, rooted in the created order (1 Timothy 2:11-13).

<sup>78</sup> The NKJV translates: "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife." The Berkeley Version translates: "Because you have yielded to your wife's suggestion."

<sup>79</sup> "There are those who think that Adam, animated by the hope of a more happy condition, because God had promised that the head of the serpent should be wounded by the seed of the woman, called her by a name implying life" (Calvin, 1:180-181).

While in verse 15 we see a promise of redemption, in verse 21 we see a picture of redemption, as God through a sacrifice does what Adam & Eve could not do through their own effort (verse 7), provide an adequate cover for their sin.<sup>80</sup>

As a final consequence of the Fall, God expelled Adam & Eve from the Garden of Eden (verses 22-24). This was actually an act of mercy, preventing Adam & Eve from having access to the tree of life, lest they eat from it and live eternally in a sinful state (Davis, p. 95).<sup>81</sup> While paradise was lost in Genesis 3, it will ultimately be regained in the eschaton/end times in the new Jerusalem (see Revelation 21 & 22).

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<sup>80</sup> “[Verse 21] serves as a contrast with v. 7, the covering of fig leaves versus the covering with tunics of animal skins. The first is an attempt to cover oneself, the second is accepting a covering from another. The first is manmade and the second is God made. Adam and Eve are in need of a salvation that comes from without. God needs to do for them what they are unable to do for themselves” (Hamilton, 1:207).

<sup>81</sup> “As residents of the garden, they could have eaten from the tree of life and perpetuated their bodily existence indefinitely. Thus the garden would have become Hell on earth, populated with the undying dead ...” (Hughes, p. 96).

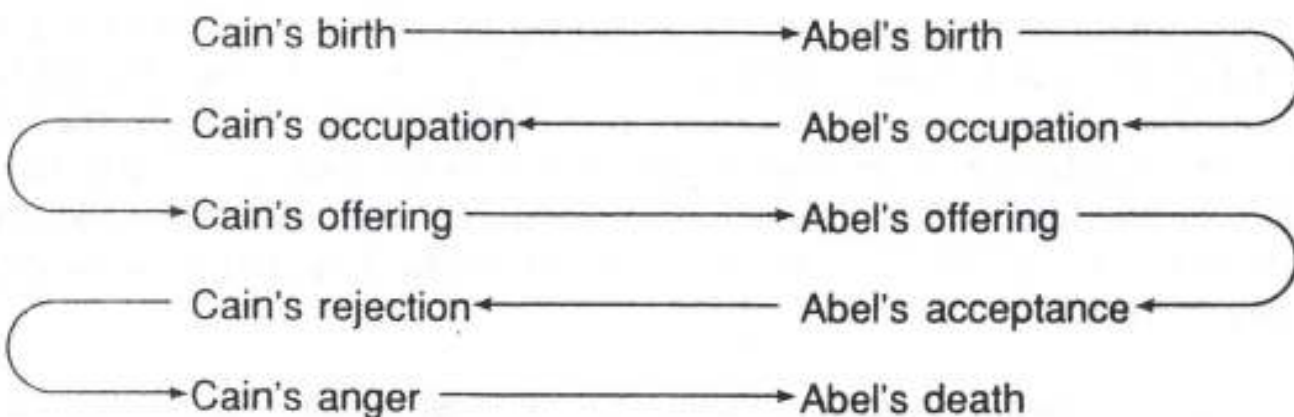
## Lesson 5: Genesis 4-5

Sin having entered the human race (chapter 3), it did not take long for it to manifest itself in all its malice through Adam & Eve's first child, Cain (4:1-16); what an awful price Adam & Eve paid for their sin! As He did with Adam & Eve (3:16-19), God judged Cain for his sin (4:11-12), yet showed him great mercy (4:15), as He did with Adam & Eve (3:21). Through corresponding genealogies (Cain's in 4:17-24; Seth's in 4:25-5:32), Moses draws a contrast between the ungodly line of Cain (cf. 1 John 3:12) and the godly line of Seth. The genealogy of Seth is traced to Noah, paving the way for the account of the Flood in chapter 6 and following.

### **4:1-2**

Sometime after the Fall, God blessed Adam & Eve with two sons, Cain and Abel. Verse 1's "knew" is euphemistic for sexual relations (cf. 4:17, 25, 19:5, et. al.). Eve's words in verse 1 ("I have gotten<sup>82</sup> a man from the LORD") are an acknowledgment that God plays the integral, ultimate part in procreation (cf. Genesis 33:5, 48:9, and Psalm 127:3).

NOTE: It is interesting to see the way Moses goes back and forth between Cain and Abel in 4:1-8 (see the following chart, taken from Ross, p. 154), perhaps his way of literarily drawing a contrast between the two.



### **4:3-8**

"In process of time" (verse 3), Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord, each offering corresponding to the occupation of the giver (verse 2): Cain's "of the fruit of the ground" (verse 3), Abel's "of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" (verse 4a). The Lord was pleased with Abel and his offering (verse 4b), but displeased with Cain and his offering (verse 5a). As a result, Cain "was very wroth, and his countenance fell" (verse 5b). How Cain and Abel knew the Lord's verdict on their respective offerings we do not know. There is some debate as to exactly why Cain's offering was rejected and Abel's

<sup>82</sup> "Cain" means "obtained" or "gotten" (Calvin, 1:191).

accepted. While it has been popularly thought and taught that part of the reason was the type of offering each offered (fruit vs. animal), this is unlikely. The text does say that their offerings were a factor (“and to his offering,” verses 4 and 5; cf. Hebrews 11:4’s “Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain”). How so? Most likely, the difference was not in the type of offering, but in the quality of the offering. By stating that Abel’s offering was “of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof” (verse 4), Moses seems to be saying that Abel gave God the very best he had<sup>83</sup>, implying that Cain did not. “Perhaps we are justified in seeing in Abel’s offering a gift that is of the finest quality, as opposed to that of his brother, which is more common” (Hamilton, 1:223). More significant than the offering itself, however, was the heart of the one offering it.<sup>84</sup> Hebrews 11:4 states that Abel offered his offering “by faith” and that his offering testified that he was “righteous,” while 1 John 3:12 states that Cain “was of that wicked one,” i.e., an unbeliever. The story of Cain & Abel, among other things, illustrates the truth that God is more concerned with the attitude behind an act of worship than with the act itself (though He’s concerned with the act, too); see Isaiah 1:10-15, Hosea 6:6, et. al. God’s rejection of Cain’s offering (verse 5a) brought Cain’s underlying heart attitude<sup>85</sup> to the surface (verse 5b). There is some debate as to the precise emotion Cain displayed, anger<sup>86</sup> or depression<sup>87</sup>; the former is, in my opinion, the better option (see 1 John 3:12 in its context). Why did Cain become angry? Envy/jealousy over the fact that God accepted Abel and his offering, not him and his offering (cf. 1 John 3:12)? God’s refusal to accept him on his terms? In verses 6 and 7, God confronts Cain about his sinful attitude, admonishing him to change it before it

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<sup>83</sup> “The Hebrew construction describing Abel’s offering is elaborate, the writer stressing that Abel went out of his way to please God” (Ross, p. 157). Abel “brought the fattest of the firstlings of his flock” (ibid.). “... [W]hereas Cain only brought ‘an offering of the fruit of the ground,’ Abel brought the best of the flock—‘the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions’ (v. 4). Cain evidently was indifferent about his offering, but Abel was careful about his. The rabbinic commentators note that ‘fat’ and ‘firstborn’ mean that Abel gave God the pick of the flock” (Hughes, p. 103).

<sup>84</sup> “In each case the person is mentioned before the offering, which suggests that the kind of offering is not as important to the story as the attitude of the person making the offering” (Ross, p. 157).

<sup>85</sup> “It is not to be doubted, that Cain conducted himself as hypocrites are accustomed to do; namely, that he wished to appease God, as one discharging a debt, by external sacrifices, without the least intention of dedicating himself to God” (Calvin, p. 196).

<sup>86</sup> Davis (p. 99) is among those who opt for anger: “[T]he Hebrew words paint a vivid picture of extreme anger” (p. 99).

<sup>87</sup> Hamilton (1:224) is among those who opt for depression, claiming that the fallen countenance Cain displayed is more consistent with depression than anger. However, Mathews (1:268) counters: “Attempts to define Cain’s reaction as ‘depression’ rather than anger smacks of modern distinctions.”

leads to further sin. In verse 7, God presents Cain with a choice: repent of his sinful attitude of anger (in which case, things would start “looking up” for him/spiraling upward: “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?”) or allow his anger to overcome him (in which case his downward spiral would continue). The latter idea is communicated by the imagery of a wild animal, lurking, lying in wait, ready to pounce (“sin lieth at the door”). Rather than letting his sin get the best of him (“unto thee shall be his desire”; cf. 3:16b and comments on), Cain needed to gain the upper hand over it (“thou<sup>88</sup> shalt rule over him”); if we don’t master sin, sin will master us (John 8:34, Romans 6:12, 16, 20, and 2 Peter 2:19). Sadly, Cain made the wrong choice. The start of verse 8 has puzzled interpreters for centuries. The Hebrew literally reads: “Cain told Abel his brother.” The question is: What did he tell him? Several ancient translations, as well as the NIV, suggest that it was something like “Let’s go out to the field.” Another possibility is that Cain told Abel about his encounter with God in verses 6 and 7.<sup>89</sup> Regardless, Cain’s refusal to master his sin resulted in his sin mastering him<sup>90</sup> to the point that he murdered<sup>91</sup> his own brother (verse 8). This was the first of the many brother-versus-brother rivalries in the book of Genesis.

#### **4:9-16**

Once Cain’s crime was committed, God launched an investigation into it. As with Adam & Eve (3:8-13), God confronted Cain about his sin (verse 9a). Notice the similarity between 3:9’s “Where art thou?” and 4:9’s “Where is Abel thy brother?,” as well as the similarity between 3:13’s “What is this that thou hast done?” and 4:10’s “What hast thou done?”<sup>92</sup> Like Adam & Eve (3:12 and 13b), Cain was evasive in his answer to God’s question (v. 9b<sup>93</sup>). As with Adam & Eve (3:16-19), God punished Cain for his sin

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<sup>88</sup> The “thou” is emphatic. The original literally reads: “you, you are to master it” (Hamilton, 1:228), the “you” being repeated for emphasis.

<sup>89</sup> Yet another possibility is suggested by Hamilton (1:230), who understands the verb to mean Cain was looking for Abel his brother.

<sup>90</sup> “Anytime a person is filled with envy and anger over God’s blessing on others, there will be disaster if that anger is allowed to run its course. Cain has become the abiding example of this pattern” (Ross, p. 161).

<sup>91</sup> In 1 John 3:12, John writes that Cain “slew” Abel. The particular Greek verb John uses is a strong one, signifying a violent death. Hamilton (1:244) translates it “butchered.”

<sup>92</sup> This question is more of an exclamation than a question.

<sup>93</sup> “The Mosaic law would have given an affirmative answer to Cain’s question. His crime would have been recognized as a particularly heinous violation of community solidarity, which was highly esteemed among the Hebrews ... The Christian community followed the same pattern of solidarity as in Israel .... While individuality was not denied, individualism in the sense of an autonomous person having privilege in opposition to or at the expense of the familial group was not practiced” (Mathews, 1:274).

(verses 11-12); a just God will not let sin go unpunished.<sup>94</sup> While in 3:17, the ground itself is cursed, in 4:11 Cain is cursed from the ground. Verse 12a explains what this means: “When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength.” According to Ross (p. 155), Cain is being banished from an area where the soil is relatively fertile (Eden) to an area where it is relatively infertile (Nod); Cain is not barred from contact with the soil, but from enjoying its productivity (Hamilton, 1:232). To one who was a farmer by trade (4:2), this was a significant penalty. The practical effect would be to make Cain a nomad, wandering from place to place, seeking fertile ground (verses 12b and 14c). Unlike Adam & Eve, Cain balked at the severity of his punishment (verses 13-14). Ironically, one who had no fear taking the life of another greatly feared for his own life (verse 14d). In an act of incredible mercy, God promised to protect Cain from those who might seek to avenge Abel’s death by taking Cain’s life (verse 15). There has been much speculation over the centuries regarding the last half of verse 15: “And the LORD set a mark upon Cain.” According to Sailhamer (p. 66), suggestions have included a dog, a bright-colored coat, and a horn on the forehead; according to Davis (p. 101), suggestions have included paralysis and the word “Yahweh.” According to Hughes (p. 107), suggestions have included a special hairstyle.<sup>95</sup> It may be that this verse is not speaking of a mark at all. The idea may be that God gave Cain a sign (so NASB) as confirmation of the promise He had just made to him. As with Adam & Eve (3:23-24), Cain’s sin resulted in his relocation further east (4:16).<sup>96</sup> The name “Nod” means “wandering, flight, exile” (Davis, p. 101). “He who had been sentenced to be a *nad* [the Hebrew word for “wanderer”] settles in the land of *nod*. The wanderer ends up in the land of wandering” (Hamilton, 1:235).

#### **4:17-24**

Moses continues to write about Cain, giving his genealogy (4:17-24), before moving on to a much more extensive genealogy, that of Seth (4:25-5:32).<sup>97</sup> Much has been made as to the origin of Cain’s wife. Most are of the opinion that she was Cain’s sister (cf.

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<sup>94</sup> Commenting on the latter half of verse 10, Calvin (1:207) states: “This is a wonderfully sweet consolation to good men, who are unjustly harassed, when they hear that their own sufferings, which they silently endure, go into the presence of God of their own accord, to demand vengeance.”

<sup>95</sup> According to Gerhard Von Rad (cited in Ross, pp. 160-161), the sign was the first tattoo. Hamilton (1:235) quips that Cain was a “marked man.”

<sup>96</sup> Adam & Eve were driven to the east of the Garden of Eden, but presumably still resided in the region of Eden (see footnote 45). Cain, their son was driven to the east of the region of Eden, to Nod. There may be significance to the fact that the expulsions are in an easterly direction, further and further away from the promised land of Palestine. This may explain verse 14’s “and from thy face shall I be hid” and verse 16’s “from the presence of the LORD.”

<sup>97</sup> Moses’ typical pattern in Genesis is to quickly deal with the genealogy of one not in the chosen line to get to the genealogy of one in the chosen line, spending much more time on the latter (see footnote 14).

5:4). It may be that Cain's building of "Enoch-ville" (Hamilton, 1:237) in verse 17 was an act of rebellion on his part, contra 4:12.<sup>98</sup> Another possibility is that God had mercifully withdrawn this particular punishment by this time. Yet another possibility is that, due to this punishment, Cain was eventually forced to change occupations (from farmer to builder). One of Cain's descendants, Lamech receives extended coverage (verses 19-24). Lamech became the first to violate God's design for monogamous (one wife) marriage, committing the sin of bigamy (two wives)/polygamy (many wives).<sup>99</sup> Moses' coverage of Lamech ends with the recording of a "taunt song" (Ross, p. 165) sung by Lamech to his wives (verses 23-24), one which Hamilton (1:240) calls "a particularly savage and vicious composition." There is some debate as to whether Lamech is speaking of something he already did or something he would do if such a situation arose. Regardless, Lamech is showing his true colors. "Cain's mindset now surfaces in his great-great-great grandson" (Hamilton, 1:241). Lamech's words in verse 24 were most likely spoken in a spirit of arrogance.<sup>100</sup>

#### **4:25-26**

Moses moves from the genealogy of Cain to that of Seth. 4:25 records the birth of Seth. As at the birth of Cain (see footnote 82), Eve's words at the birth of Seth form a word play with his name. Seth is the Hebrew word *sheth*. The Hebrew verb translated "hath appointed" is *shath*.<sup>101</sup> "Seed" in 4:25 may be an allusion to the promise of 3:15, signifying that Seth (not Cain)<sup>102</sup> was the son of Adam & Eve through whom the

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<sup>98</sup> "The building of the city seems to be a defiant act by Cain, for he was condemned to be a ceaseless wanderer in the earth" (Ross, p. 166).

<sup>99</sup> As mentioned earlier in this study (see footnote 8), Genesis is an historical book and, thus, often merely describes what happened (descriptive) without also necessarily prescribing what should or should not have happened (prescriptive). Therefore, by recording Lamech's polygamy Moses is not necessarily approving it. Though the Bible does not explicitly forbid polygamy, it does do so implicitly (as in Genesis 2:24). Furthermore, the Bible paints a less-than-flattering picture of polygamy. "The attempt to improve on God's marriage ordinance (19; cf. 2:24) set a disastrous precedent, on which the rest of Genesis is comment enough" (Davis, p. 104); "... [N]early every polygamous household in the OT suffers most unpleasant and shattering experiences .... The domestic struggles that ensue are devastating" (Hamilton, 1:238); "The Lord, therefore, willed that the corruption of lawful marriage should proceed from the house of Lamech, in order that polygamists might be ashamed of the example" (Calvin, 1:217); "Although Genesis does not condemn the patriarchs for their practice of polygamy, it is transparent from Genesis itself that such practices resulted in painful consequences" (Mathews, 1:285).

<sup>100</sup> "Lamech, impiously perverting this divine declaration, mocks its severity" (Calvin, 1:222).

<sup>101</sup> "Seth means 'granted.' So the sense of verse 25 is that she named him 'Granted,' saying, 'God has granted me another child ....' Thus Eve attributed the birth of her child to the grace of God" (Hughes, p. 115).

promised seed would come (as, indeed, was the case). The last half of 4:26 is somewhat puzzling. Davis (p. 104) offers the following interpretation: “This phrase [‘to call upon the name of the LORD’] frequently designates public worship (cf. Ps. 79:6; 116:17; Jer. 10:25; Zeph. 3:9); evidently, corporate and formal worship now supplemented individual, spontaneous worship.”

### **5:1-32**

Chapter 5 begins the second of the eleven “these are the generations of ...” sections in Genesis (see under “Structure” in Lesson 1). In this section, which continues through 6:8, Moses records “the book of the generations of Adam” (5:1). Moses traces Seth’s lineage back to its point of origin, Adam.<sup>103</sup> In 5:1-2, Moses reiterates much of 1:26-28. The rest of the chapter (verses 3-32) traces the godly line from Adam to Noah (the second significant genealogy in Genesis, found in chapter 11, more or less picks up where the genealogy of chapter 5 leaves off, tracing the godly line from Noah to Abraham<sup>104</sup>). Notable in the genealogy of Genesis 5 are the words that end each entry: “and he died,” proof of the truth that sin brings death (cf. comments on 3:19).<sup>105</sup> Like the seventh name in the Cain genealogy (Lamech), the seventh name in the Seth genealogy (Enoch; cf. Jude 14) is prominent. It is highly likely that both are in the seventh place to draw attention to them<sup>106</sup>, thus magnifying the contrast between the two lines. While Lamech was noted for his wickedness (4:19, 23-24), Enoch is noted for

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<sup>102</sup> This begins a pattern found time and again throughout the book of Genesis, namely, God choosing the younger son over the older son. God’s ways are certainly not our ways (Isaiah 55:8).

<sup>103</sup> Technically, the point of origin is God (cf. Luke 3:38).

<sup>104</sup> In comparing these two genealogies, one cannot help but notice the life span decline. “The descending scale for life spans in the OT is roughly 1000-800 years (Adam to Lamech); 600-200 (Noah to Abraham); 200-100 (Abraham to Joseph/Moses); 70 years (Ps. 90:10)” (Hamilton, 1:256). Two factors may account for this phenomenon. One, it took time for the death/decay process ignited by the Fall to take full effect. And two, prior to the Flood, the earth may have been surrounded by a water vapor canopy (see comments on 1:6-8) that promoted longer life spans. “Advocates of the canopy theory suggest that this antediluvian [pre-Flood] canopy arrested life-shortening solar rays” (Davis, p. 106); “[A]t the scientific level it has been suggested that before the Flood, while the vapor canopy was still in the heavens, deadly age-causing rays were filtered out from the atmosphere and as a result people were not subject to aging” (Hamilton, 1:256).

<sup>105</sup> This fact prompts Davis (p. 104) to state: “Reading Genesis 5, like walking through a cemetery, produces a solemnity of soul.” It is interesting to consider the fact that Adam lived a total of 930 years, old enough to see his great-great-great-great-great grandson, Lamech (nine generations living at the same time).

<sup>106</sup> “Biblical genealogists often placed in the seventh position individuals who are uniquely important” (Hamilton, 1:257).



his righteousness (5:21-24). “The rhetorical-theological effect of this parallel is to call attention to the moral character of each line of descent. Lamech is the epitome of Cain’s corrupt family. As the seventh name in the genealogy, the number for completeness, Lamech’s notorious career attests to the peculiarly wicked life of the Cainites. Chapter 5 shows that Adam was also survived by a righteous line of descendants (Seth) through whom God would choose to preserve and bless the earth’s inhabitants” (Mathews, 1:282). Enoch’s outstanding characteristic was the fact that he “walked with God” (5:22 and 24; cf. Noah in Genesis 6:9, as well as Micah 6:8 and Malachi 2:6), “a common description of the life of fellowship and obedience with the Lord, as if to say that walking with the Lord was a step above mere living” (Ross, pp. 174-175). Because Enoch walked with God, God saw fit to spare him the fate of physical death, instead choosing to translate him (“and he was not; for God took him,” verse 24; cf. Hebrews 11:5).<sup>107</sup> Enoch’s son, Methusaleh has the distinction of being “the patron saint of geriatrics” (Hamilton, 1:258), living longer than any other man, a whopping 969 years (5:27)!<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> The only other human being to enjoy this privilege was Elijah (2 Kings 2:11).

<sup>108</sup> Methusaleh’s year of death would have been the year of the Flood.

## Lesson 6: Genesis 6-7

The first 11 chapters of Genesis chronicle four major events: Creation, the Fall, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel incident.<sup>109</sup> The account of the Flood is found in Genesis 6-9. The last verse of chapter 5 (verse 32) begins the record of Noah's place in the genealogy of Seth. This record is interrupted by the account of a significant event in the life of Noah, the Flood (chapters 6, 7, 8, and the first half of chapter 9). The genealogical record resumes in 9:18-19 before being interrupted once again by the account of another significant event in the life of Noah (9:20-27). The genealogical record resumes once again in 9:28, weaves its way through chapters 10 and 11, and culminates at the end of chapter 11 with the recording of Abraham's place in the genealogy, paving the way for an extended focus on the life of Abraham in chapters 12 and following.

The first half of chapter 6 gives the reason for the Flood—God's judgment upon a race gone wrong. In the midst of the darkness, however, the light of God's mercy once again shines (as it did with Adam & Eve and Cain<sup>110</sup>), as God mercifully spares the lives of Noah, his family, and some of the animals.

### **6:1-4**

These verses are some of the most perplexing in the Bible. Particularly perplexing is the identification of the "sons of God" in verse 2. Historically, three different views have been suggested: 1) They are fallen angels who inhabited human bodies in order to have physical relations with human women. If so, this gross perversion of God's pattern for procreation was one of the sins that precipitated the Flood. The primary support for this position is the use of "sons of God" to describe angels in Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7. Some proponents of this view interpret 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6-7 as supporting this position. The primary objection to this view is Christ's words in Matthew 22:30//Mark 12:25//Luke 20:35-36, implying that angels do not procreate. This was the view held by most of the early church fathers; 2) They are royalty/dynastic rulers with the "daughters of men" being their harems. If so, the sin of polygamy was one of the sins that precipitated the Flood. The primary support for this position is the use of divine terminology for human rulers, as in 2 Samuel 7:14//1 Chronicles 17:13 (where the Davidic king is referred to as God's son)<sup>111</sup>; "The interpretation pursued by most Protestant conservative scholars"

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<sup>109</sup> Creation, Corruption, Catastrophe, and Confusion.

<sup>110</sup> Commenting on 6:18, Hamilton (1:284) states: "Even before he unleashes his anger God announces his intention to save at least one human being. This sequence of grace and indignation has already appeared two times in Genesis. Before God banished Adam and Eve from the garden he clothed them. Before he exiled Cain he placed a mark on him to protect him. And here God announces his covenant even before he sends his flood."

<sup>111</sup> Ross (p. 182) opts for a hybrid view, harmonizing views 1 and 2: "Fallen angels left their habitation and indwelt human despots and warriors, the great ones of the earth."

(Hamilton, 1:264) is 3) they are godly men (Sethites?) who intermarried with ungodly women (Cainites?). If so, the sin of intermarrying with unbelievers was one of the sins that precipitated the Flood.<sup>112</sup> While this third view seems most likely (based on the overall context<sup>113</sup>), dogmatism concerning the identification of the sons of God in Genesis 6:2 should be avoided. As Davis (p. 110) states: “The lively controversy among evangelical interpreters over the identification of the sons of God has resulted in no consensus, probably because decisive evidence does not exist.”<sup>114</sup> Based on the context (viewing verses 1-4 in a negative light), verse 2’s seeing (“saw”) leading to taking (“took”) may be an echo of 3:6. By the same token, verse 2’s “of all which they chose” may signify an act of sinful autonomy/independence. As a result of the sin of verse 2 (whatever it was), God declared in verse 3: “My spirit shall not always strive with man.” The Hebrew verb translated “strive” may also be understood to mean “abide.”<sup>115</sup> Regardless, the point of verse 3 is that, because of sin, mankind’s days were numbered, with 120 years being the number.<sup>116</sup> Like verses 2 and 3 before it, verse 4 also poses an interpretive challenge, namely, whether or not the “giants” (cf. Numbers 13:32-33) spoken of were the offspring of the sons of God-daughters of men.

### **6:5-8**

What God saw in verse 5 (cf. 6:11-12) stands in marked contrast to what He saw in chapter 1 (verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31). Man’s corruption was extensive and intensive, extending to his every thought and to the very depths of his being (“every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,” verse 5; cf. Jeremiah 17:9). Man’s wickedness was so great that God became sorry and sorrowful (verse 6; cf. verse 7). While some have taken verses like Genesis 6:6 and drawn erroneous

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<sup>112</sup>“Old Testament history illustrates all too well how interreligious unions spelled disaster for Israel. This Sethite incident of intermarriage with the ungodly leads to the deterioration of the godly family; as a forewarning it alerts the holy seed of Israel not to neglect God’s prohibition” (Mathews, 1:331).

<sup>113</sup> The context leading up to the opening of chapter 6 is the contrast between the ungodly line of Cain and the godly line of Seth in chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>114</sup> Hamilton (1:265) adds: “Suffice it to say, it is impossible to be dogmatic about the identification of ‘sons of God’ here. The best one can do is to consider the options. While it may not be comforting to the reader, perhaps it is best to say that the evidence is ambiguous and therefore defies clear-cut identifications and solutions.”

<sup>115</sup> If “abide” is the correct translation, the point may be that God’s spirit, meaning the life breath God gives to animate the human body (cf. Genesis 2:7), would be removed from all men (cf. Genesis 6:17, 7:22, Job 34:14-15, and Psalm 104:29), Noah and his family excepted, in 120 years as a result of the Flood.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. the 40 days of Jonah 3:4. Based on this verse, it is commonly believed that it took Noah 120 years to build the ark. If so, this number is not only testament to the patience of God (1 Peter 3:20), but also to the enormity of Noah’s task.

conclusions about the person and/or plan of God, the simple truth this verse is communicating is that God was genuinely upset over man's sinfulness. While verse 6 speaks of God's pain, verse 7 speaks of His plan (Ross, p. 184). The Hebrew verb translated "destroy" in verse 7 means to erase by washing (Hamilton, 1:275), signifying the means by which God would carry out His plan.<sup>117</sup> That the Flood nearly wiped out the entirety of the human race and the animal kingdom (verse 7; cf. 7:21 and 23) seems like a case of "overkill." But, as Calvin (1:250) states: "And this all tends to inspire us with a dread of sin; for we may easily infer how great is its atrocity when the punishment of it is extended even to the brute creation." Verse 8 is testimony to the goodness of God.

### **6:9-22**

Verse 9 begins the third of the eleven "these are the generations of ..." sections in the book of Genesis (see under "Structure" in Lesson 1). In this section, which continues through the end of chapter 9, we read about what happened to Noah.<sup>118</sup>

In contrast to those around him (notice the phrase, "in his generations" in verse 9; cf. 7:1), Noah was a man of commendable character.<sup>119</sup> In verse 9, he is called "just" and "perfect" (cf. 17:1), the latter meaning "blameless" (so NASB and NIV) or free from defect (Hamilton, 1:277). Like his ancestor, Enoch (see 5:22 and 24 and comments on), Noah "walked with God" (verse 9).

In verse 13, God shares His plan with Noah. Based on the fact that the Hebrew verb translated "destroy" in verse 13 is the same verb translated "corrupt" in verse 11 and "corrupt" and "corrupted" in verse 12, Hamilton (1:278) writes: "To capture this consistency of word choice we may render the above as '*gone to ruin ... was the earth ... indeed, it had gone to ruin ... all flesh had ruined its way .... I will ruin them.*' The choice of the same word to describe both the earth's condition and the intended action of God must be deliberate. God's decision is to destroy what is virtually self-destroyed or self-destroying already."

In verses 14-16, God gives Noah some specific instructions regarding the construction of an ark. The ark was a barge-like structure. Archer (p. 216) calls it a "boxlike

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<sup>117</sup> "... [T]he great flood would be a most effective way of purging the world—certainly the most graphic. It would wash the earth clean, so that not a trace of the wicked or their wickedness would be found. God thus purified the earth of all but the remnant" (Ross, p. 190). Accordingly, Hamilton (1:272) translates verse 7: "I will wash from the earth the man whom I have created."

<sup>118</sup> "It seems clear from the way the author begins the account that the main purpose of the story of the Flood is not to show why God sent a flood but rather to show why God saved Noah" (Sailhamer, p. 81).

<sup>119</sup> "Noah is a reproach to the believer who surrenders to the allurements of a sinful generation. He maintains his fidelity and purity when all others have followed the pack" (Mathews, 1:358).

construction.”<sup>120</sup> Due to differing understandings of exactly how long a cubit (verse 15) was, suggested dimensions for the ark vary.<sup>121</sup> According to Davis (p. 121), the ark had 95,700 square feet of space, 1,396,000 cubic feet of space, and a gross tonnage of 13,960 tons.

In verse 21, God commands Noah to gather food, not only for himself and his family, but also for the animals. Due to 1) decreased levels of activity and 2) hibernation (whether natural or supernaturally-induced), the total amount of food needed for the animals was likely far less than one might think. Verse 22 is a testimony to Noah’s faithful obedience to God (cf. Genesis 7:5, 9, 16, and Hebrews 11:7).

### **7:1-24**

Chapter 7 begins the account of the Flood itself. According to verses 2 and 3, Noah was instructed to take far more clean animals and birds (7 pairs of each) with him on the ark than unclean animals (1 pair of each). Most likely, this was for the purpose of having animals to sacrifice once the Flood ended (see 8:20). The massive volume of water needed for a worldwide<sup>122</sup> flood was supplied both from above (see comments on 1:6-8 regarding a vapor canopy) and from below (verse 11).

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<sup>120</sup> The English word, “ark” comes from the Latin word, *arca*, meaning “box” (Sailhamer, p. 83).

<sup>121</sup> This is reflected in differing numbers for cubic feet of space: Davis (p. 121) suggests 1,396,000; Egner (p. 14) suggests 1,518,750; Archer (p. 216) suggests 3,600,000.

<sup>122</sup> Theological liberals (as well as many evangelicals) claim that the Flood was local, rather than worldwide, in scope. For a listing of 7 reasons why it had to have been a worldwide deluge, see pages 125-126 of Davis (cf. pgs. 208-217 of Archer).

## Lesson 7: Genesis 8-9

In Genesis 8-9, Moses continues and completes his account of the Flood (through the first half of chapter 9) and tells about an infamous incident in Noah's later years (the last half of chapter 9).

### 8:1-5

Verse 1 of chapter 8 marks a turning point in the Flood narrative.<sup>123</sup> This can be seen by the following chart, taken from Ross (p. 191):

Title: "These are the generations of Noah."
Introduction: Noah's righteousness and Noah's sons (6:9-10).
A God resolves to destroy the corrupt race (6:11-13).
B Noah builds an ark according to God's instructions (6:14-22).
C The Lord commands the remnant to enter the ark (7:1-9).
D The flood begins (7:10-16).
E The flood prevails 150 days, and the mountains are covered (17:17-24).
F God remembers Noah (8:1a).
E' The flood recedes 150 days, and the mountains are visible (8:1b-5).
D' The earth dries (8:6-14).
C' God commands the remnant to leave the ark (8:15-19).
B' Noah builds an altar (8:20).
A' The Lord resolves not to destroy humankind (8:21-22).

To "remember" (verse 1; cf. Genesis 19:29, 30:22, Exodus 2:24, Judges 16:28, 1 Samuel 1:11, 19, Psalm 105:42, and Luke 23:42) "emphasizes God's faithful love and intervention on behalf of His own" (Davis, p. 126). "To say 'God remembered Noah' is to say that God faithfully kept his promise to Noah by intervening to end the flood" (Ross, p. 197). God's sovereign control of the weather is directly seen in verse 1 ("God made") and indirectly so in verse 2.<sup>124</sup> Verse 2 should be understood as chronologically prior to verse 1 (see NIV rendering of verbs in verse 2: "had been closed" and "had stopped falling"). According to verse 4, the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. Mount Ararat itself (some 17,000 feet in elevation) is located in the region of Armenia, in the eastern part of modern-day Turkey. There is an interesting Hebrew wordplay in verse 4. The Hebrew verb translated "rested" in verse 4 is the verb from which the

<sup>123</sup> "The story now takes a dramatic turn" (Hamilton, 1:299). "Just two words, 'God remembered,' explain the reversal in the flow of the waters and thus the flow of the narrative" (Mathews, 1:382).

<sup>124</sup> The Hebrew verbs translated "were stopped" and "was restrained" in verse 2, like the verbs in 7:11 ("were broken open" and "were opened"), are passives, indicating that Someone else is doing the acting.

name Noah is derived. “Thus one might say that the ark ‘noah-ed’ on one of the mountains of Ararat” (Hamilton, 1:301).

### **8:6-12**

There is some question as to whether or not the raven Noah sent out (verse 7) actually returned to the ark. Hamilton (1:304) says no: “The raven is a carrion eater and did not return because it found food on the mountain peaks.” In verses 8-12, Noah sends out a dove three times, the purpose of which is stated by Hamilton (1:304-305): “The dove is a valley bird, and it was released in order to determine whether the lower-lying areas were habitable” (cf. verse 8). The second time, the dove returned with an olive leaf in its beak (verse 11a), the significance of which is stated by Calvin (1:279-280): “... [T]hat as the olive tree does not grow upon the mountains, and is not a very lofty tree, the Lord had given his servant some token whence he might infer, that pleasant regions, and productive of good fruits, were now freed from the waters” (cf. verse 11b).

### **8:13-19**

At first glance, verses 13 and 14 appear contradictory (verse 13 says that the face of the ground was dry on the first day of the first month, while verse 14 says that the earth was dry on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the second month). Which was it? Both. Two different Hebrew verbs are used. “Were dried up” in verse 13 is the Hebrew verb that means to be free of moisture, while “was dried” in verse 14 is the Hebrew verb that means the complete absence of water (Hamilton, 1:305). A distinction can also be seen in “the face of the ground” (verse 13) vs. “the earth” (verse 14). All told, Noah and those with him were inside the ark for 377 days (see Walton’s chart entitled “Time Periods of the Flood”). Even though Noah knew that the ground was to some degree dry (verse 13), he did not disembark from the ark until God explicitly told him to do so (verses 15-19), testament to his faithful obedience to God (cf. comments on 6:22).<sup>125</sup> Verses 16-17 are the first words God spoke to Noah since He commanded him to enter the ark in 7:1-4.

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<sup>125</sup> “Though Noah was not a little terrified at the judgment of God, yet his patience is commended in this respect, that having the earth, which offered him a home, before his eyes, he yet does not venture to go forth. Profane men may ascribe this to timidity, or even to indolence; but holy is that timidity which is produced by the obedience of faith. Let us therefore know, that Noah was restrained, by a hallowed modesty, from allowing himself to enjoy the bounty of nature, till he should hear the voice of God directing him to do so. Moses winds this up in a few words, but it is proper that we should attend to the thing itself. All ought indeed, spontaneously, to consider how great must have been the fortitude of the man, who, after the incredible weariness of a whole year, when the deluge has ceased, and new life has shone forth, does not yet move a foot out of his sepulchre, without the command of God. Thus we see, that, by a continual course of faith, the holy man was obedient to God; because, at God’s command, he entered the ark, and there remained until God opened the way for his egress; and because he chose rather to lie in a tainted atmosphere than to breathe the free air, until he should feel assured that his removal would be pleasing to God” (Calvin, 1:280).

## **8:20-22**

Using some of the clean animals and birds that he had taken with him on the ark (see 7:2-3), Noah offered them to God as a burnt offering (verse 20). The burnt offering (the offering was completely consumed) symbolized the worshiper's total surrender and dedication to the Lord (Ross, p. 197). God smelling (cf. Leviticus 26:31) is anthropomorphic (cf. comments on 3:8). In mercy<sup>126</sup>, God determined not to judge the earth again with a worldwide flood (verse 21; cf. 9:11 and 15). Verse 22 is one of the passages (Lamentations 3:22-23 is another) upon which the hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness" is based.

## **9:1-7**

In contrast to the death produced by the Deluge, the opening verses of chapter 9 emphasize life.<sup>127</sup> In words reminiscent of 1:28 (cf. 1:22 and 8:17), God "blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (verse 1; cf. verse 7). In order to facilitate the accomplishment of this command, God placed within the animals a fear of man (verse 2). In verses 3 and 4, God gives man "a generous permission followed by a single prohibition" (Hamilton, 1:314). The permission (cf. 2:16) was the authorization to eat meat (verse 3; cf. 1:29). The prohibition (cf. 2:17) was the forbiddance of eating such meat without first removing the blood from it, because blood symbolized life (verse 4; cf. Leviticus 17:10-14 and Deuteronomy 12:23). While the blood of animals could be shed (i.e., their lives taken), the blood of human beings could not, the difference being that humans are in the image of God<sup>128</sup> (verse 6b; cf. 1:26-27 and comments on), whereas animals are not. For this reason, animals (verse 5a; cf. Exodus 21:28-29) or humans (verse 5b) that killed a human being were themselves to be killed (verse 6a), "by man" signifying the agency of human government in the execution of the penalty (biblical basis for capital punishment).<sup>129</sup> "... [W]ithout the possibility of divine purging by flood, societal conditions jeopardizing human life would escalate to intolerable proportions" (Mathews, 1:405). Therefore, God in His common grace<sup>130</sup> uses human government as a means

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<sup>126</sup> The clause, "for the imagination of man's heart is evil [cf. 6:5 and comments on] from his youth" (cf. Psalm 51:5, 58:3, and Isaiah 48:8) should be understood in a concessive sense (so NIV: "even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood").

<sup>127</sup> This emphasis is seen by the stress on producing life [as in verses 1 & 7] and on protecting or preserving life [as in verses 5-6] (Ross, p. 207).

<sup>128</sup> Genesis 9:6 is testimony to the truth that the image of God, though certainly defaced by the Fall, was not erased by it. The reason why God takes the murder of those in His image so seriously is expressed by Calvin (1:295): "... [S]ince [men] bear the image of God engraven on them, He deems himself violated in their person."

<sup>129</sup> According to verse 5, God is the Executioner ("will I require" 3 times). According to verse 6, He uses man (human government) as His agent ("by man"). See the New Testament parallel in Romans 13:1-7.



to restrain human sinfulness, lest the earth revert to the degree of decadence it displayed in the days prior to the Deluge (spoken of in 6:11-13).

### **9:8-17**

These verses contain the Noahic covenant (foretold in 6:18), a unilateral covenant God made with all mankind (verses 8-9) and all creatures (verse 10), promising to never again judge the world with a worldwide flood (verse 11; cf. verse 15 and Isaiah 54:9). The sign of the Noahic covenant is the rainbow (verses 12-17).<sup>131</sup>

### **9:18-19**

The genealogy “interrupted” by 6:1-9:17 is briefly resumed. In these verses, we learn that Canaan was the son of Noah’s youngest son, Ham. This piece of information aids one’s understanding of the incident in the section to follow (see 9:22).

### **9:20-27**

“This bizarre little story about Noah’s drunkenness and exposure, along with the resulting cursing of Canaan, has perplexed students of Genesis for a long time” (Ross, p. 209). The episode begins with Noah trying his hand at viticulture (verse 20), producing wine, drinking it, becoming drunk, and uncovering himself (verse 21).<sup>132</sup> Noah’s youngest son, Ham witnessed his father’s nakedness (“saw the nakedness of<sup>133</sup> his father”) and told his two older brothers without doing anything about it (verse 22). The two older brothers, Shem and Japheth, responded by covering their father’s nakedness and doing so in such a way that they did not witness it (verse 23).<sup>134</sup> The actions of the sons revealed an underlying respect (in the case of Shem and Japheth) or disrespect (in the case of Ham) for their father.<sup>135</sup> Consequently, once Noah was

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<sup>130</sup> Common grace is God’s grace shown toward all men in common. His special grace is His grace shown toward Christians in particular.

<sup>131</sup> Some commentators are of the opinion that rainbows appeared prior to this time, but that with the Noahic covenant they took on new significance.

<sup>132</sup> Much like with Lamech’s polygamy in 4:19, “Genesis does not stop to moralize on Noah’s behavior. It is neither condemned nor approved” (Hamilton, 1:321). Noah’s actions, however, are self-condemnatory (cf. footnote 99).

<sup>133</sup> While some interpret the expression “saw the nakedness of” as euphemistic for some kind of sexual sin (based on Leviticus 20:17), it is clear from the context that in this passage it is speaking of “shameful or defenseless exposure” (Ross, p. 214).

<sup>134</sup> “It is difficult for people living in the modern world to understand and appreciate the modesty and discretion of privacy called for in ancient morality” (Ross, p. 215).

<sup>135</sup> “... [I]t behoves us to infer from the severity of the punishment, how abominable in the sight of God is the impious contempt of parents, since it perverts the sacred order of nature, and

made aware of what had happened (verse 24<sup>136</sup>), he cursed Ham's son, Canaan<sup>137</sup> (verse 25) and blessed Shem (verse 26) and Japheth (verse 27). Interestingly, these are the only words spoken by Noah recorded in Scripture.

### **9:28-29**

These verses conclude the recording of Noah's place in the line of Seth begun in 5:32, interrupted in 6:1, resumed in 9:18, and interrupted again in 9:20.

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violates the majesty and authority of God, in the person of those whom he has commanded to preside in his place" (Calvin, 1:304-305).

<sup>136</sup> "When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him ...." (NIV).

<sup>137</sup> Why Noah cursed Ham's son, Canaan, and not Ham himself, is quite perplexing. Ross (p. 217) suggests that Noah "anticipated in [Canaan] the evil traits that marked his father Ham," adding: "The attitude that led to the deed of Ham came to full fruition in the Canaanites" (p. 218). Davis (p. 129) corrects a faulty misapplication of this curse: "Popular (although totally misguided) exposition of the passage has applied the curse to the descendants of Ham and ultimately to black peoples, and concluded that the latter are inferior and doomed to servitude. This unsubstantiated interpretation, however, is utterly foreign to the text. The curse upon Canaan was basically fulfilled when Israel, led by Joshua, conquered the inhabitants of Canaan and made them subject." Walton (*Genesis*, p. 355) adds: "There are few families from the line of Ham that eventuate in dark-skinned peoples, and none from the line of Canaan."

## Lesson 8: Genesis 10-11

Genesis 10 and 11 are heavy on genealogy, prompting Davis (p. 135) to state: “Many endure rather than enjoy reading these two chapters.” Chapter 10 gives the genealogies of Noah’s three sons: Japheth (verses 2-5); Ham (verses 6-20); and Shem<sup>138</sup>, tracing the line of Shem through Eber’s son, Joktan (verses 21-31). Chapter 11 begins with the infamous Tower of Babel incident (verses 1-9); continues with the genealogy of Shem, this time tracing his line through Eber’s other son, Peleg (verses 10-26); and concludes with the genealogy of Terah (verses 27-32), leading to the lengthy Abraham narrative, starting in chapter 12. Chapter 11 chronologically precedes chapter 10<sup>139</sup>, as evidenced by 10:32.

### **10:1-32**

This chapter is often referred to as the “table of the nations.” Because of its genealogical format, “at first glance it does not appear that the table is the stuff of which exciting exegetical expositions are made” (Ross, p. 221). 10:1 begins the fourth of the eleven “these are the generations of ...” sections in the book of Genesis (see under “Structure” in Lesson 1), a section that continues through 11:9.

Verses 2-5 give the genealogy of Noah’s son, Japheth. The descendants of Japheth inhabited “the nations that make up the geographical horizon of the author, the outer fringe of the known world, a kind of ‘third world’ over against the nations of Ham (Canaan) and Shem” (Sailhamer, p. 99).

Verses 6-20 give the genealogy of Noah’s son, Ham. A cursed line (see 9:25), it is not surprising to see among the Hamites such unsavory names as Canaan (verse 6)/Canaanite (verses 18 & 19); Babel (verse 10); Asshur, or Assyria (verse 11); Nineveh (verse 11); the Philistines (verse 14); and Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 19). Hughes (p. 158) quips: “The descendants of Canaan noted in verses 15-19 read like a ‘most wanted’ list of Israel’s inveterate enemies.”

Verses 21-31 give the genealogy of Noah’s son, Shem. In keeping with the pattern throughout Genesis of mentioning the non-chosen line first, the chosen line last (see footnotes 14 and 97), Shem is saved for last, since it is through his line that Abraham would come (and through Abraham the promised seed of Genesis 3:15, the Lord Jesus Christ). This genealogy traces the line of Shem through Eber’s son, Joktan, while the genealogy of Shem in chapter 11 traces his line through Eber’s other son, Peleg.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Generally speaking, the descendants of Japheth populated the European continent, the descendants of Ham the African continent, and the descendants of Shem the Asian continent.

<sup>139</sup> “Chapter 11 is the cause; chapter 10 is the effect” (Ross, p. 243).

<sup>140</sup> “...[T]he line of Shem is traced up to the two sons of Eber and from there continues to follow the line of the second son, Joktan (vv. 26-29). It is significant that another genealogy of Shem is repeated after the account of the building of Babylon (11:1-9), and there the line is continued to

Verse 25's "in his days was the earth divided" is most likely a reference to the Tower of Babel incident recorded in chapter 11. This is perhaps the reason why Eber and his wife named their son "Peleg," which means "division."

### **11:1-9**

In direct defiance of the divine directive of Genesis 9:1 and 7, post-Flood humanity congregated in one locale, "a plain in the land of Shinar" (verse 2)<sup>141</sup>, lest they "be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (verse 4). Once there, they conspired to build a city and a tower "whose top may reach unto heaven"<sup>142</sup> in order to make a name for themselves (verse 4).<sup>143</sup> There is some question as to exactly what

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Abraham through the first son of Eber, Peleg (11:10-26). In arranging the genealogy of Shem in such a way, the author draws a dividing line through the descendants of Shem on either side of the city of Babylon. The dividing line falls between the sons of Eber, that is, Peleg and Joktan. One line leads to the building of Babylon and the other to the family of Abraham" (Sailhamer, p. 102). Likewise, Mathews (1:490) writes: "... [T]he Joktan line is followed by the Babel failure, while chap. 11's giving of the Shemite family by Peleg results in the hero Abraham. This highlights the difference in the two inner branches of the Shemite family—one leading to disgrace and the other to grace."

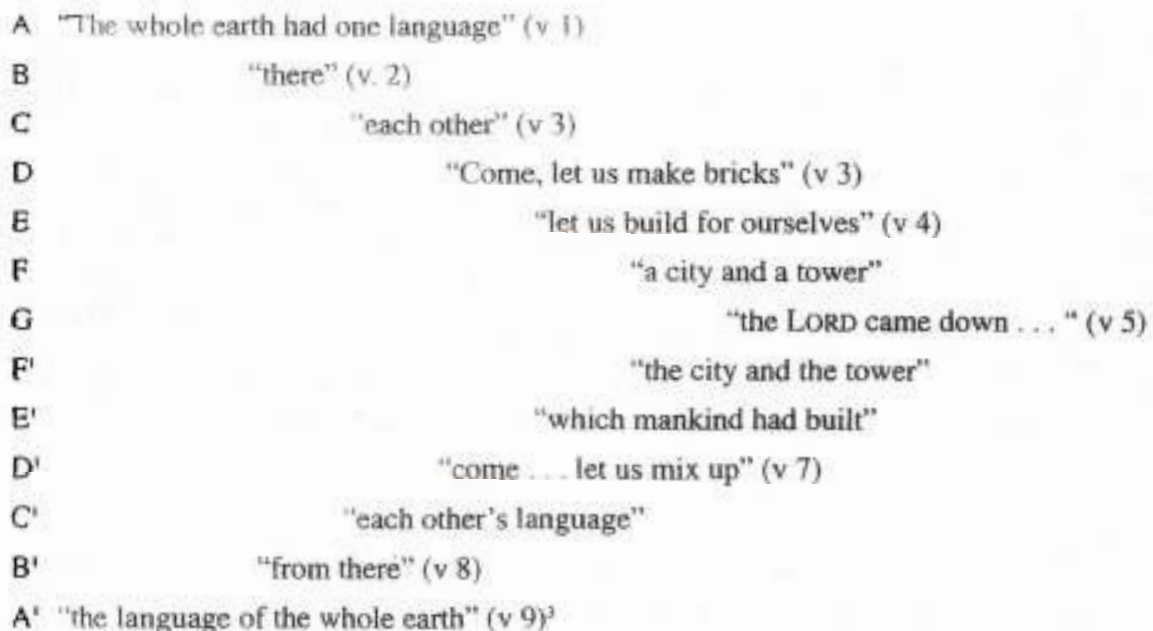
<sup>141</sup> It is interesting to note that man is once again traveling eastward (verse 2). "It can hardly be without importance that the author has provided the story with such a geographical orientation. As early as Genesis 3, the author has shown his interest in marking the directions of travel taken in man's search for a home. When the man and his wife were driven from the garden because they had chosen the knowledge of good and evil for themselves, they were made to settle in a land 'eastward' from the garden (3:24). When Cain was cast out from the presence of God because he refused God's instruction, he went to dwell in a land 'east of Eden' (4:16). When Lot divided from Abraham and sought for himself a land 'like the garden of the LORD,' he moved 'toward the east' while Abraham remained in the land (13:10-12). In light of such intentional uses of the notion of 'eastward' within the Genesis narratives, we can see that here too the author intentionally draws the story of the founding of Babylon into the larger scheme at work throughout the book. It is a scheme that contrasts God's way of blessing (e.g., Eden and the Promised Land) with man's own attempt to find the 'good.' In the Genesis narratives, when man goes 'east,' he leaves the land of blessing (Eden and the Promised Land) and goes to a land where the greatest of his hopes will turn to ruin (Babylon and Sodom)" (Sailhamer, p. 104; cf. footnote 96).

<sup>142</sup> The expression, "whose top may reach unto heaven," besides signifying size, likely also signifies security (cf. Deut 1:28, 9:1, and Jer 51:53). A tall tower would greatly enhance the security of a city built on a plain. Davis (p. 148) suggests that the purpose for the tower was to provide safe haven in the event of another flood.

<sup>143</sup> This sounds very Satan-esque (see Isaiah 14:13-15). "The declaration of the men of Shinar, to make a city, a tower, and a name for themselves, may well be the first declaration of humanism" (Francis Schaeffer, quoted in Egner, p. 17). Hughes (p. 172) gives the corrective:

kind of edifice the "Tower of Babel" was. While one opinion is that it was the equivalent of a modern skyscraper, most believe that it was an ancient "ziggurat."<sup>144</sup>

In verse 5, the "Building Inspector" arrives, as God "came down" to see what was going on. The significance is captured by Hamilton (1:354): "It is difficult to miss the irony in this verse. The builders' intention is to erect a tower whose top will be 'in the heavens,' that is, among the gods. But even though they build the tower, it is so far from the heavens that God must *come down* [emphasis his] to see it. ... [I]t is ironical that God must come down to bring into focus, so to speak, what was supposed to be a building invading celestial heights." That this divine visit is the focal point of the Tower of Babel incident is visualized by the following chart, taken from Hughes (p. 168):



Also significant in verse 5 is the phrase, "children of men," a phrase that "reduces these pretentious human beings to their real size. They are but mere earthlings" (Hamilton, 1:354). Verse 6 sounds a note of alarm (cf. 3:22). The Tower of Babel incident

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"The only name that counts is that which God gives, as when he said to Abraham, 'I will ... make your name great' (12:2)."

<sup>144</sup> "The ziggurat was a lofty, massive, solid brick structure—multi-staged (like giant porch steps) up to heaven" (Hughes, p. 170). "The tower itself was probably a Babylonian ziggurat, a staged or stepped temple tower. One climbed the tower by ladders that ascended from one stage to another—each stage dedicated to a different heavenly body and painted a different color. At the top was a temple to the god of the city and an altar where sacrifices were offered" (Egner, p. 16).

threatened to be the start of much worse.<sup>145</sup> Lest it become so, God in mercy intervened, disrupting the ability of the inhabitants of the city to communicate (verse 7), leading to their dispersion (verses 8a and 9b) and the end of their building project (verse 8b). The “let us” (cf. 1:26 and 3:22)<sup>146</sup> of verse 7 is significant in that it echoes the words of the citizens of Babel in verses 3 and 4. Ironically, the citizens of Babel did make a name for themselves (cf. verse 4); however, it was certainly not the kind of name they envisioned. In memory of the incident described in this section, the city was named Babel (verse 9a), derived either from the Hebrew verb *balal*, meaning “to confuse” or from the Babylonian verb *babalu*, meaning “to scatter” or “to disappear” (Davis, p. 150). The Tower of Babel incident is a powerful reminder of the biblical truth that God humbles the proud (cf. Nebuchadnezzar’s testimony in Daniel 4:37).

### **11:10-26**

This section comprises the fifth of the eleven “these are the generations of ...” sections in the book of Genesis (see under “Structure” in Lesson 1). Once again (as in 10:21-31), Moses gives the genealogy of Shem, only this time he traces the line through Eber’s other son, Peleg, eventually arriving at Terah, and then Abraham (another instance where the non-chosen line, Joktan’s, is dealt with first, the chosen line, Peleg’s, last). This genealogy mirrors the one found in Genesis 5. While the Genesis 5 genealogy takes one from Adam to Shem, this genealogy picks up where the previous one left off, taking one from Shem to Abraham. “This list of names isn’t riveting reading, but it gets you from Noah’s son Shem to Abram (Abraham) ....” (Fee & Stuart, p. 30). Abraham, though not the oldest of Terah’s son’s<sup>147</sup>, is listed first, because he is the most significant son, the one through whom the promised seed of Genesis 3:15 would come.

### **11:27-32**

11:27 begins the sixth of the eleven “these are the generations of ...” sections in the book of Genesis (see under “Structure” in Lesson 1), a section that continues through

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<sup>145</sup> “As long as sin reigns, diversity among nations is required to restrain the wickedness that a unified sinful humanity might achieve” (Mathews, 1:429). In other words, God moved to prevent the catastrophic corruption that would come through such collusion.

<sup>146</sup> For the significance of the “let us” of verse 7 in regards to the person of God, see comments on 1:26.

<sup>147</sup> How do we know that Abraham was not the oldest son of Terah? According to Acts 7:4, Abraham left Haran after his father, Terah died. According to Genesis 11:32, Terah was 205 at the time; according to Genesis 12:4, Abraham was 75 years old at the time. Thus, Terah was 130 years old when Abraham was born. According to Genesis 11:26, Terah became a father for the first time at the age of 70, giving birth to either Nahor or Haran. Abraham would not be born for another 60 years.

25:11.<sup>148</sup> In 11:27-32, Moses records the genealogy of Terah. Terah and his family hailed from Ur of the Chaldees (verse 28). According to Joshua 24:2, they were idol worshippers (in the opinion of several writers, they were more specifically moon worshippers). Significantly, verse 30 highlights the fact that Abraham's wife, Sarah was barren (cf. the barrenness of Rebekah in 25:21). This adds to the drama of the Abraham narrative to follow, as God promises Abraham a seed from his own body (15:4). Verse 31 records the move of Terah, Abraham & Sarah, and Lot from Ur westward to Canaan. The family makes it as far as Haran. While in Haran, Terah dies (verse 32). The stage is now set for chapter 12, the key chapter in the entire book of Genesis.

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<sup>148</sup> Mathews (2:85) makes an interesting observation: "In the sequence of the eleven ... ('generations') headings in the Book of Genesis, 'This is the account ... of Terah' (11:27) is the sixth, making the Abraham narrative the center unit of the book ..."

## Lesson 9: Genesis 12-14

As we move from chapter 11 into chapter 12 of Genesis, we move from the first of the two major divisions of the book (chapters 1-11) into the second (chapters 12-50) (see under “Structure” in Lesson 1). With chapter 12, the focus of the book narrows from God’s dealings with mankind in general to His dealings with the nation of Israel in particular. Not only is Israel the focus of the rest of Genesis, but also of the rest of the Old Testament. From 12:1 through 25:11, the focus is on the first of the patriarchs<sup>149</sup>, Abram (or Abraham). Chapter 12 contains 1) the origin of the Jews through the call of Abram (12:1-9<sup>150</sup>) and 2) the sojourn of Abram & Sarai in Egypt (12:10-20). Chapter 13 contains 1) the separation of Abram and Lot (13:1-13) and 2) the reiteration of the promises God made to Abram when He first called him (13:14-18; cf. 12:1-3). Chapter 14 contains 1) the capture and rescue of Lot (14:1-16) and 2) Abram’s encounter with two kings (14:17-24).

### 12:1-3

The end of chapter 11 (verse 31) tells how Abram’s family left their native Ur and traveled to Haran on their way to the Promised Land (Canaan). The opening verses of chapter 12 tell us what prompted them to do so—the call of God. The call was specifically to Abram (“Now the LORD had said unto Abram ...,” verse 1). Through the use of words showing increasingly intense levels of intimacy (“out of thy country” ... “from thy kindred” ... “from thy father’s house”), verse 1 heightens the price Abram had to pay to follow God’s call.<sup>151</sup> Notice also that God did not tell Abram his destination ahead of time (“unto a land that I will shew thee,” verse 1; cf. Hebrews 11:8). While some interpret verse 1 as a second call to Abram (the first being while he was in Ur, the second while he was in Haran), it is better (based on Acts 7:2-4) to view verse 1 as describing the one call he received while still in Ur (so the KJV’s “had said” in verse 1). As Abram obeyed God’s call, God promised to make of Abram a great nation (verse 2;

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<sup>149</sup> “A ‘patriarch’ was the legal and spiritual head of the family. He had great power over his clan, but also was responsible for the well-being and protection of all in his family unit” (Benware, p. 42).

<sup>150</sup> Ross (p. 259) calls 12:1-9 “the central passage of the book.”

<sup>151</sup> Notice also the words of Davis in this regard: “The archaeological data give the impression the Abraham’s Ur was a sophisticated, well-designed, wealthy city, one that provided the best available comforts. It is in this light that the nature and implications of Abraham’s call to a land about which he knew nothing must be evaluated” (p. 166) and “Abraham’s move from Mesopotamia and his father’s house probably meant losing his inheritance” (p. 167). Walton (*Genesis*, p. 392) writes: “He [Abram] must decide whether to abandon his land in favor of the land Yahweh offers. He must decide whether to abandon what family he still has in favor of the family Yahweh promises (against all logic, given Sarai’s infertility). He must decide whether to set aside this blessing, his inheritance, for the inheritance Yahweh describes. The initiative offers much, but its cost is significant.”



cf. 13:16, 15:5, 17:2, 4-6, 16, 18:18, and 22:17), to bless him (verse 2; cf. 22:17), to make his name great (verse 2), and to bless all other nations through him (verse 3; cf. 18:18 and 22:18). This last promise, to bless all other nations through Abram, is most likely a reference to the One who would arise from the Jews to become the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ (cf. Galatians 3:8, 14, and 16).

### **12:4-9**

In simple faith, taking God at His word, Abram left Ur and headed west to Canaan (“So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him,” verse 4; cf. Hebrews 11:8), accompanied by his father, Terah; his wife, Sarai; and his nephew, Lot (11:31). The family traveled north and west, stopping and settling for a time in Haran, where Terah died (11:32). After Terah’s death, Abram, Sarai, Lot, et. al. (verse 5) continued on, traveling south and west until they reached their ultimate destination, Canaan (verse 5), stopping in Shechem (verse 6). In verse 7, God appears to Abram and makes another (cf. verses 2-3) promise to him, the provision of land that his descendants would one day possess (cf. 13:14-15, 17, 15:7, 18-21, 17:8, and 24:7).<sup>152</sup> In response, Abram worshipped God through the building of an altar (verse 7; cf. verse 8 and 13:18). From Shechem, Abram traveled further south to an area between Bethel and Ai and once again (cf. verse 7) worshipped God through the building<sup>153</sup> of an altar (verse 8<sup>154</sup>). From there, Abram continued further south to the region known as the “Negev,” the dry region of southern Palestine (verse 9).<sup>155</sup>

### **12:10-20**

This section is the first of three (the other two being in chapters 20 & 26) in Genesis in which a patriarch (Abram here and in chapter 20; Isaac in chapter 26), fearing for his life, tells the half-truth that his wife is his sister (see the following chart, taken from p. 271 of Ross, which shows the many similarities between the three).

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<sup>152</sup> Abraham did not live to see this land promise fulfilled (Acts 7:5 and Hebrews 11:9). It was not until the Conquest (in Joshua’s day) that the Jews first possessed the Promised Land (cf. Genesis 15:13-16).

<sup>153</sup> “The nature of Abraham’s existence in the land is very nicely reflected in the two verbs *pitched* and *built*. He pitched a tent, a temporary structure, for his own comfort; he built an altar, a permanent structure, for worshiping God” (Davis, p. 173).

<sup>154</sup> The expression, “called upon the name of the LORD” (cf. 4:26, 13:4, 21:33, and 26:25) in verse 8 is a technical term for worship (Hamilton, 1:378; cf. comments on 4:26). Ross (p. 267) calls it a “public proclamation of faith in the Lord.”

<sup>155</sup> Hamilton (1:378-379) suggests a possible significance behind the places Abram visited: “It has often been noted that the trip of Abram (Shechem to Bethel to Negeb) is parallel to that of Jacob, and most importantly to the direction followed by the Israelites in their conquest of Canaan. Does this mean that the journeys of Abram and Jacob function as a sign unto their children’s children that the conquest had, as it were, already taken place symbolically in the time of the patriarchs?”

Chart 16. Comparison of the Sister Stories

Gen. 12:10–20	Gen. 20:1–18	Gen. 26:1–11
famine in the land (10)	—	famine in the land (1)
beauty of Sarai (11)	—	beauty of Rebekah (7)
deception as sister (13)	deception as sister (2)	deception as sister (7)
fear of death (13)	fear of death (11)	fear of death (7)
Egyptians saw her (14)	—	men of that place asked (7)
taken by Pharaoh (15)	taken by Abimelech (2)	—
wealth to Abram (16)	wealth to Abram (14–16)	—
plagues (17)	warning dream (3–7)	observed by Abimelech (8)
Abraham rebuked (18–19)	Abraham rebuked (9–10)	Isaac rebuked (9)
expulsion (20)	prayer of Abraham and healing of wombs (17)	—

Due to a famine in the land of Palestine, Abram & Sarai took temporary (“sojourn”) refuge in Egypt (verse 10).<sup>156</sup> Two other famines in Genesis that precipitated similar sojourns are found in chapter 26 and in chapters 41 and following. Fearing for his life<sup>157</sup> (verses 12 and 13), Abram compelled Sarai to tell the Egyptians that she was his sister.<sup>158</sup> Abram’s hunch was correct. Sarai’s beauty<sup>159</sup> (verses 11 and 14) was noticed

<sup>156</sup> Was their choice to leave the Promised Land for Egypt an improper one? Most believe not. As has been pointed out previously (see footnotes 8, 99, and 132), Genesis, being an historical book, describes actions without necessarily commenting on their propriety. Accordingly, this move on the part of Abram & Sarai is not evaluated. However, as with the actions of Lamech (footnote 99) and Noah (footnote 132), the consequence of the action may provide a clue as to its propriety. As John Davis states on page 159 of his commentary on Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, entitled *Conquest and Crisis*: “It is also significant to observe that problems usually attended such migrations on the part of God’s people.” While this fact certainly is not decisive, it may tip the scales in favor of attributing a negative significance to this move. Benware (p. 42) views their action in a negative light: “It was evidently a time of failure in the life of this patriarch ... Abraham did not evidence faith in the Lord when he fled to Egypt ....”

<sup>157</sup> It is possible that Abram’s motives were not entirely selfish. It may be that he was trying in and of himself to ensure the fulfillment of the promise of fertility (12:2’s “I will make of thee a great nation”), for if Abram died, this promise would not be fulfilled. However, even if Abram had the right end, he certainly had the wrong means. “It is never right to do wrong in order to get a chance to do right” (Bob Jones, Sr.). Davis (pp. 177-178) adds: “It is presumptuous for a man ever to assume that circumstances might turn out badly if he does not lie. His faith in the providential care of God is weak. Passages such as the one at hand admonish us never to succumb to such a temptation.”

<sup>158</sup> There was, of course, some truth to this fact, Sarai being Abram’s half-sister (Genesis 20:12). However, a half-truth is still an untruth. “... [U]sing half of the truth to disguise the other half must be regarded a lie” (Davis, p. 177).

<sup>159</sup> Sarai’s beauty is somewhat remarkable in light of the fact that she was 65 years old at the time. Davis (p. 176) states in this regard: “The beauty of Sarah is a problem because she was 65 years old. It must be remembered, however, that patriarchal life spans were twice what ours are.

by the Egyptians, resulting in her being taken into Pharaoh's harem (verse 15).<sup>160</sup> As is so often the case, man makes a mess that God has to clean up. With the fertility promise in jeopardy (if Sarai is permanently taken away from Abram, the promise cannot be fulfilled), God intervenes<sup>161</sup> by striking Pharaoh and his house with great plagues (verse 17).<sup>162</sup> Somehow, Pharaoh came to understand the significance of these plagues, rebuked Abram for his actions, and expelled Abram & Sarai from Egypt (verses 18<sup>163</sup>-20).

Chart 17. **Parallels Between Abram's and the Nation's Experiences**

Incident	Abram	Israel
Severe famine in land	Gen. 12:10	Gen. 43:1; 47:4
Sojourn in Egypt	Gen. 12:10	Gen. 47:4
Killing of the males	Gen. 12:11–13	Exod. 1:16
Bondage	Gen. 12:14–15	Exod. 1:11–14
Great wealth	Gen. 12:16	Exod. 12:36
Plagues on Egypt	Gen. 12:17	Exod. 7–11 (see 11:1)
Summons: "Take . . . go"	Gen. 12:19	Exod. 12:32
Use of <i>šillah</i> ("send")	Gen. 12:20	Exod.—"Let my people go"
Journey to the Negev	Gen. 13:1	Num. 13:17, 22

### **13:1-13**

Abram's nephew, Lot figures prominently in chapters 13 and 14 (and again in chapter 19). After being expelled from Egypt, Abram, Sarai, and Lot returned to the Promised Land (verse 1), retracing their steps from Egypt to the Negev to the area between

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Abraham died at 175, Sarah at 127. At 65, therefore, Sarah might have had the beauty and vigor of a modern woman of 30."

<sup>160</sup> While some are of the opinion that Pharaoh and Sarai had physical relations, most are of the opinion that they did not.

<sup>161</sup> "How God preserved this unbroken line to Christ through primeval and patriarchal history is one of the great themes of Genesis—as evidenced in a series of dramas where the covenant line was almost wiped out and then saved by events both ridiculous and sublime" (Hughes, p. 159).

<sup>162</sup> One cannot help but see a parallel with the Exodus. As Ross (pp. 273-274) states: "... [T]he great deliverance out of bondage by the plagues that Israel experienced had previously been accomplished in the life of the ancestor of the nation" (see the chart above, taken from p. 273 of Ross).

<sup>163</sup> Pharaoh's words in verse 18, "What is this that thou hast done unto me?" are reminiscent of God's words to Eve in 3:13 ("What is this that thou hast done?") and to Cain in 4:10 ("What hast thou done?").

Bethel and Ai (verse 3). Once again (cf. 12:8 and comments on), Abram worships (verse 4).

Because both Abram (verse 2) and Lot (verse 5) had so much livestock, the area in which they found themselves could not sustain the animals of both men, causing friction between their respective herdsmen (verses 6-7) and leading to an inevitable parting of the ways. Consequently, Abram, in an act of incredible kindness, offered Lot first choice of land (verses 8-9). While in chapter 12, Abram faithlessly sought to manipulate the situation, here in chapter 13 he by faith rests in God's land promise (12:7).<sup>164</sup> Lot, like Eve in 3:6 and the sons of God in 6:2, bases his choice on what he sees (verse 10; appearances can indeed be deceiving). An ominous note is struck in verse 10 with the mention of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. verse 13). In spite of its Eden-like ("even as the garden of the LORD") and Egyptian-like fertility (v. 10), the Jordan valley was a spiritually desolate region. Abram and Lot separated, Lot traveling east away from the Promised Land<sup>165</sup> and Abram remaining in it (verses 11-12<sup>166</sup>).

### **13:14-18**

Lot's departure undoubtedly saddened Abram. Perhaps for this reason<sup>167</sup>, God chose to encourage Abram by reiterating two of the promises He had made to him earlier, the land promise (verses 14, 15, and 17; cf. 12:7) and the fertility promise (verse 16; cf. 12:2). It is hard to miss the parallelism between Lot's lifting up of his eyes in 13:10 and Abram's lifting up of his eyes in 13:14. Verse 16 is a simile, signifying a very large number. Abram, a man always on the move (cf. Psalm 105:13), moves to Hebron (where he stays for awhile, until 20:1) and worships God again through the building of yet another altar (verse 18; cf. 12:7 and 8).

### **14:1-16**

In chapter 13, Lot left both Abram and the Promised Land and moved near Sodom. Not surprisingly, things go bad for him as a result. In a war between five kings (among whom was the king of Sodom, verse 2) and four kings, the four-king confederation

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<sup>164</sup> Though, as Sailhamer (p. 118) points out, "Abraham is on the verge of giving the Promised Land to Lot," Abram trusts God to keep His promise regardless of the choice Lot makes. Thus, Abram's willingness to give up the land here in chapter 13 is much like his willingness to give up Isaac in chapter 22.

<sup>165</sup> For the significance of this easterly/away from the Promised Land movement, see footnote 141.

<sup>166</sup> Verse 12 states that Lot moved his tents "toward Sodom." Soon thereafter, Lot was living in Sodom (14:12), then became a leading citizen of Sodom (19:1's "sat in the gate"). A lesson to be learned here: Placing oneself in such close proximity to sin usually leads to being drawn into it.

<sup>167</sup> "For although the same thing had been already promised to Abram; yet God now adapts his promise to the relief of the present sorrow" (Calvin, 1:375).

prevailed (verse 10<sup>168</sup>), resulting in the ransacking of Sodom (verse 11) and the capture of Lot, Lot having become a resident of Sodom (verse 12).

Upon receiving news of the predicament into which his nephew had gotten himself (verse 13), Abram immediately sprang into action, formed a fighting force (verse 14), defeated the foe<sup>169</sup> (verse 15<sup>170</sup>), and delivered Lot (verse 16).

### **14:17-24**

Following his defeat of the four-king federation, Abram was met by two kings, the king of Sodom (verse 17) and Melchizedek, the king of Salem<sup>171</sup> (verse 18). Melchizedek (cf. Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 5:6, 10, and 6:20-7:28) is a mysterious figure.<sup>172</sup> Davis (p. 181) gives four options as to his identity: “1) he was a theophany of the preincarnate Christ; 2) he was a historical, human person who typified Christ; 3) he was a Canaanite priest; and 4) he was Shem.” Most opt for the second choice (cf. Hebrews 7:3’s “made like unto the Son of God”). Verse 18 says that Melchizedek “brought forth bread and wine.” Coupled with Melchizedek being called “the priest of the most high God” (verse 18), some view these items as signifying the elements of the Lord’s Supper. Most, however, are of the opinion that their purpose was merely the refreshment of Abram and his troops (cf. Judges 8:5 and 2 Samuel 16:1-2). Melchizedek pronounced a blessing upon Abram (verse 19), and Abram paid a tithe to Melchizedek<sup>173</sup> (verse 20<sup>174</sup>). Once

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<sup>168</sup> Calvin (1:382) is of the opinion that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah did not fall, as if accidentally, into the tar pits, but intentionally, so as to avoid death at the hands of their enemies. Hamilton (1:403) is of the opinion that the Hebrew verb is better translated “hid,” particularly in light of the fact that the king of Sodom apparently survived the battle (14:17-24; unless, of course, this passage is speaking of his successor).

<sup>169</sup> Abram’s defeat of the four-king confederation was an impressive task, to say the least. This confederation had steamrolled its way to victory, not only over the five-king confederation (14:8-12), but also over many other formidable foes (14:5-7). According to Deuteronomy 2:10-11, 20-21, some of the foes mentioned in 14:5 were very large in stature.

<sup>170</sup> Verse 15 indicates that Abram drove the four-king federation “unto Hobah, which is on the left hand [or north] of Damascus.” In doing so, Abram drove them out of the Promised Land.

<sup>171</sup> “Salem” is likely short for Jerusalem (see Psalm 76:2).

<sup>172</sup> “... Melchizedek appears in the narrative as if out of nowhere and just as quickly is gone, not to be encountered again nor subsequently explained” (Sailhamer, p. 122). Ross (pp. 293, 295, and 300) makes the case that Melchizedek appears at just the moment he does in order to keep Abram from accepting the offer that the king of Sodom was about to make (verse 21). God used Melchizedek’s appearance and subsequent words (verses 19-20) to, as it were, steel Abram’s resolve.

<sup>173</sup> Why did Abram pay this tithe? While the byproduct would have been the meeting of Melchizedek’s material needs (cf. Numbers 18:21), the purpose was most likely worship. Calvin

Melchizedek departed, the king of Sodom offered Abram all the spoil from the war (verse 21), an offer that Abram refused, lest a man (the king of Sodom) get the glory that belonged to God alone (verses 22-23).<sup>175</sup>

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(1:392) states in this regard: “Nor is it to be doubted but Abram offered the gift to God, in the person of Melchizedek, in order that, by such first-fruits, he might dedicate all his possessions to God.”

<sup>174</sup> While the Hebrew grammar is somewhat ambiguous in verse 20 (who is the “he” and who is the “him?”), Hebrews 7:4-10 makes it crystal clear that Abraham was the giver of the tithe, Melchizedek the receiver.

<sup>175</sup> “The believer can learn an important lesson from this narrative: the gifts of the ungodly are often attached to deadly strings” (Davis, p. 182).

## Lesson 10: Genesis 15-17

The Abraham narrative (begun in chapter 12) continues in chapters 15-17. In chapter 15, God speaks to Abram in a vision, repeating the fertility promise (verses 1-5; cf. 12:2 and 13:16) and the land promise (verses 7-16; cf. 12:7, 13:14-15, and 17). In between (in verse 6), Moses makes mention of Abram's saving faith. Chapter 15 continues with the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant (verses 17-18a), a major provision of which was the giving of the land of Canaan (also known as the Promised Land) to Abram's descendants. Chapter 15 ends by marking out the boundaries of this land (verses 18b-21). Chapter 16 records how Abram & Sarai foolishly and faithlessly attempted to fulfill the fertility promise through Sarai's maid, Hagar, resulting in the birth of Ishmael. Thirteen years later (compare 16:16 with 17:1), God appears to Abram, reaffirming the Abrahamic covenant. In the process, He changes Abram's name to Abraham (17:5), makes circumcision the sign of the covenant (17:9-14), and changes Sarai's name to Sarah (17:15). Though Abraham's faith falters (17:17-18), God's faithfulness to the fertility promise remains firm (17:19-21). In faithfulness to the covenant, Abraham and his household are circumcised (17:23-27).

### **15:1-5**

According to Hebrews 1:1, God "at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." One such "prophet" was Abram (Genesis 20:7). One of the many ways God spoke to Abram was through vision (verse 1; cf. Numbers 12:6).<sup>176</sup> In the vision Abram had in Genesis 15 God promised him protection ("Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield<sup>177</sup>," verse 1; cf. Genesis 26:24, 46:2-3, and Acts 18:9-10) and provision ("and thy exceeding great reward," verse 1). Why was Abram afraid (verse 1)? Sailhamer (p. 128) suggests that Abram was afraid that the promises of God would fail (see 15:2 and 8). In light of Abram's response in verse 2, it is likely that he understood the "reward" of verse 1 to be primarily offspring (cf. Psalm 127:3's "reward," same Hebrew word). In verses 2 and 3, Abram expresses concern that he has not received the promised son and that, therefore, his heir would be his household servant, Eliezer.<sup>178</sup> God assures Abram that Eliezer would not be his heir; rather, his heir would be a son he himself would father (verse 4). As a visual aid, God has Abram gaze into

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<sup>176</sup> The significant component of a vision was not the visual (the image or images seen), but the audial (the message communicated). In fact, Hamilton (1:418) goes so far as to say: "What is transmitted from God to a mortal in such visions is not a visual image but a word from God."

<sup>177</sup> Other Scriptures that use the metaphor of a shield to communicate the concept of divine protection include Deuteronomy 33:29, Psalm 3:3, 18:2, 28:7, et. al.

<sup>178</sup> "... [A]dopting an heir was a well-known practice in Mesopotamia. Wealthy but childless couples adopted one of their slaves to inherit their property and also to care for them in old age" (Davis, p. 185).

the Palestinian sky<sup>179</sup>, promising him that his descendants would be as innumerable as the stars<sup>180</sup> (verse 5; cf. 22:17, 26:4, and Exodus 32:13; cf. “dust of the earth” in 13:16 and 28:14 and “sand which is upon the sea shore” in 22:17/”sand of the sea” in 32:12).

## **15:6**

This is one of the most important verses in all of Scripture. In it, Moses speaks of Abram’s saving faith. There is some question as to exactly when Abram’s conversion took place. While this verse seems to suggest that it took place here in Genesis 15<sup>181</sup>, Davis (p. 186) is probably correct in suggesting that it actually took place earlier, as evidenced by the faith Abram exercised in leaving Ur (12:1-4a). Underlying Abram’s belief in the fertility promise of verses 4 & 5 was his belief in the One who gave the promise (“he believed in the LORD,” verse 6a), a belief that (it is safely assumed) also underlay his obedience to the command to leave his homeland for the Promised Land. Belief/faith in the person of Yahweh (and in what Yahweh said) (verse 6a) was the means whereby Abram was saved/justified<sup>182</sup> (verse 6b; cf. Romans 4 and Galatians 3).

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<sup>179</sup> “The Palestinian sky is unclouded by pollutants, and the evening stars are magnificent. Sitting in an open space on the Judean hills, one feels he can almost touch the myriad stars before him” (Davis, p. 186).

<sup>180</sup> According to Henry Morris (*The Biblical Basis for Modern Science*, p. 156), astronomers estimate that there are 10 million billion billion (1 with 25 zeroes after it) stars in our universe. To get an idea of how vast this number is, Morris estimates that, at a rate of 20 numbers per second, it would take at least 100 million billion years to count that high. John Piper (Oct. 24, 1999 sermon on Romans 5:1-2 entitled “Let Us Exult in the Hope of the Glory of God”) has said that on the clearest of nights, the naked eye can see only one-forty millionth of the stars in the universe.

<sup>181</sup> Ross (p. 309), however, states: “A close study of the Hebrew construction ‘and he believed’ reveals that the writer did not intend this verb to be understood as a result of the preceding section.” In other words, 15:6 can be viewed somewhat independently, revealing that Abram was converted and how (by faith) without necessarily revealing when he was converted. Calvin (1:408) states in this regard: “If any one object, that Abram previously believed God, when he followed Him at His call, and committed himself to His direction and guardianship, the solution is ready; that we are not here told when Abram first began to be justified, or to believe in God; but that in this one place it is declared, or related, how he had been justified ....”

<sup>182</sup> Justification is the act of God whereby he legally declares the believing sinner to be righteous in His sight due to the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to him. Of course, for the Old Testament believer, the work of Christ was yet future; therefore, the Old Testament believer was saved “on credit.” The moment one places his faith in God and His Word, he is reckoned righteous in God’s sight. Abram so placed his faith and, as a result, the Lord “counted [NIV: “credited”] it [his faith] to him for righteousness.”



## **15:7-11**

While in the previous section (15:1-5) God reiterated the fertility promise to Abram, in this section He reiterates the land promise. In spite of a direct, divine declaration of the promise (verse 7), Abram doubted, asking for confirmation (verse 8). While some do not fault Abram for this, this writer is not among them. Just as Gideon faithlessly sought confirmation of what God had already promised in Judges 6:14 and 16 (a fact that Gideon himself confessed in Judges 6:36 and 37!) by putting out the fleece (Judges 6:36-40), so here Abram faithlessly sought confirmation of what God had already promised (cf. Luke 1:18-20). Just as with Gideon, God mercifully condescended to Abram, granting him the confirmation he requested. This God did by making a covenant with Abram through an unusual, but customary procedure. In that day, one would enter into a covenant by cutting some animals in half, laying the halves in two rows opposite one another, and walking through the midst of the rows (cf. Jeremiah 34:18-19).<sup>183</sup> Thus, God instructed Abram to get the animals needed to cut<sup>184</sup> such a covenant (verse 9). After Abram cut some of the animals in two and separated their remains into rows (verse 10), “fowls [NASB: “birds of prey”],” symbolic of those who would oppose the covenant (Ross, p. 305), swooped down, seeking to devour the carcasses (verse 11a). Abram drove them away (verse 11b).<sup>185</sup>

## **15:12-16**

As the (presumably) next day (cf. verse 5, the previous night) drew to a close (“And when the sun was going down”), a divinely-induced (cf. Genesis 2:21 and 1 Samuel 26:12) and disturbing (“horror of great darkness<sup>186</sup>”; cf. Job 4:12-15) “deep sleep fell upon Abram” (verse 12). While Abram was asleep, God revealed to him that his descendants would be enslaved and afflicted (cf. Exodus 1:11) for 400 years<sup>187</sup> in a

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<sup>183</sup> “The biblical world offers widespread evidence that animals were slaughtered in treaty contraction ceremonies. Some of these texts—but not all of them—suggest that the two parties to the treaty walked between the rows of freshly killed animal flesh, and in so doing placed a curse upon themselves if either party should prove disloyal to the terms of the treaty: May they too be torn apart if they are responsible in any way for violating the arrangement” (Hamilton, 1:430).

<sup>184</sup> The Hebrew verb translated “made” in 15:18 is literally “cut.” The cutting of the animals symbolized the cutting of a covenant (cf. our “cut a deal”).

<sup>185</sup> “Elsewhere in the OT *birds of prey* (who are unclean, Lev. 11:13-19; Deut. 14:12-18) represent foreign nations (Ezek. 17:3, 7; Zech. 5:9), most likely Egypt. If a case can be made that the slain animals, all appropriate as sacrificial victims, represent the nation of Israel, then here in a sense Abram is protecting his descendants from the attacks of outsiders” (Hamilton, 1:433).

<sup>186</sup> Based on the following verse (verse 13), many see the darkness as symbolic of the difficulties Abram’s descendants would face in Egypt. According to Ross (p. 307), it “signified the enslavement that would precede the fulfillment.”

foreign land (verse 13; cf. Acts 7:6), a reference to the captivity in Egypt.<sup>188</sup> God would, however, judge the nation that would enslave Abram's descendants (verse 14a; cf. Acts 7:7a), a reference to the ten plagues inflicted upon Egypt, and bring Abram's descendants out of the land in which they would be held captive (verse 14b; cf. Acts 7:7b), a reference to the Exodus. Next, God promised Abram a long ("in a good old age") and satisfying ("thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace"<sup>189</sup>) life (verse 15), a promise that He kept (Genesis 25:8). Following their enslavement and emancipation, Abram's descendants would return to Canaan (verse 16a), the timing of their return being in accordance with the turning of God's wheels of justice (verse 16b).<sup>190</sup>

### **15:17-21**

In what Sailhamer (p. 130) calls a "pyrotechnic vision," God passes between the rows of dissected animals in the form of "a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp" (verse 17) and, in so doing, establishes the Abrahamic covenant (verse 18a). The fact that God alone passes between the rows signifies that the Abrahamic covenant was unilateral and unconditional (notice that verse 18 says "the LORD made a covenant with Abram," not God and Abram made a covenant with one another); the promises made to Abram (see 12:2-3 and 7 and comments on) would be fulfilled in spite of the unfaithfulness of him and his descendants. One of those promises was the promise that Abram's descendants would one day possess the land of Canaan. Chapter 15 closes by outlining some of the boundaries of the Promised Land, identifying its southwestern ("the river of Egypt"<sup>191</sup>) and eastern ("the great river, the river Euphrates") boundaries (verse 18b; cf. Numbers 34:1-12) and by identifying the various people groups that the descendants of Abram would dispossess (verses 19-21). The closest Abram's descendants have ever come to possessing all the Promised Land was during the

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<sup>187</sup> According to Exodus 12:40-41 (cf. Galatians 3:17), the exact time was 430 years. The 400 of this verse should be understood as a round number (430 rounded off to the nearest hundred is 400).

<sup>188</sup> Ross (p. 311) points out the significance of this verse for those to whom it was written: "Abraham and his descendants would know that such oppression and enslavement was not a threat to the fulfillment of the promises—it was part of the divine plan."

<sup>189</sup> "To go to one's grave *peacefully* means to come to the end of one's life with a sense of contentment and fulfillment" (Hamilton, 1:436).

<sup>190</sup> Verse 16b is a reference to the Conquest, giving the legal basis for it (cf. Leviticus 18:24-28). "This commentary on the immorality of the indigenous population of Canaan also establishes Joshua's invasion as an act of justice rather than of aggression" (Hamilton, 1:436). It also is testimony to God's longsuffering/forbearance, as He waits to execute His justice until the iniquity is full, until He can forbear no longer.

<sup>191</sup> Though it is sometimes thought that "the river of Egypt" (cf. Numbers 34:5 and Joshua 15:4) is the Nile, it is more likely the modern Wadi el-Arish, the dividing line between Palestine and Egypt.

heyday of the monarchy (the reigns of David and Solomon); therefore, fulfillment of the land promise awaits the millennial kingdom.

### **16:1-6**

Ten years had passed (verse 3) since God first gave Abram the fertility promise (12:2's "I will make of thee a great nation"), yet his wife, Sarai was still barren (verses 1 & 2; cf. 11:30). As in 12:10-20, Abram & Sarai faithlessly take matters into their own hands in order to ensure the fulfillment of the fertility promise.<sup>192</sup> Presumably during 12:10-20's sojourn in Egypt (see especially 12:16), Sarai acquired an Egyptian maid by the name of Hagar (verse 1b). In keeping with a custom of the day<sup>193</sup>, Sarai suggested that Hagar serve as her surrogate ("it may be that I may obtain children by her," verse 2; cf. Genesis 30:3), a suggestion that Abram took ("And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai," verse 2<sup>194</sup>). Consequently, Hagar became Abram's "wife"<sup>195</sup> (verse 3) and had

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<sup>192</sup> "Sensing the need to solve this problem themselves, Abraham and Sarah resorted to a custom of the time, and Sarah gave her personal handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham as a concubine" (Benware, p. 42).

<sup>193</sup> "According to the Nuzi tablets, ancient Hurrian cuneiform documents dealing with custom and law of this period, the action of Abram and his wife in this respect was perfectly legitimate. Any children born of this proxy arrangement would be considered legal heirs of the husband unless and until children should be born of the wife herself" (Eugene Merrill, cited in Benware, p. 43); "Legal customs made it clear that a barren wife could give her maid to her husband as a wife and that a son born of that union could be the heir if the husband ever declared him to be so" (Ross, p. 319). Though the actions of Abram & Sarai were culturally/socially acceptable, they were not acceptable to God. As Sailhamer (p. 134) states: "Sarai's plan of offering her maid to Abram to bear him a child was apparently acceptable within the social custom of the day. There is reason to doubt, however, whether the biblical author looks approvingly at the scheme." Reasons why we are led to believe that the actions of Abram & Sarai were improper include the following: 1) Their actions were a violation of the one man-one woman-one flesh principle of Genesis 2:24; 2) Though their actions may have been an attempt to accomplish the right end, they utilized the wrong means (cf. footnote 157); the right means was prayer (Genesis 20:17-18 and 25:21; 1 Samuel 1:10-17, 20, and 27; Luke 1:13); perhaps the very name of the child, Ishmael ("God hears") reminded Abram & Sarai of this fact; and 3) The many parallels between this account and the account of the Fall (see next footnote) tie the two accounts together, thus implying that the actions of Abram & Sarai in Genesis 16, like those of Adam & Eve in Genesis 3, were improper. As Mathews (2:178) states: "Although the passage does not overtly condemn Abram for his concession to Sarai, the allusion to the Garden (16:2b; 3:17), in which the Lord condemns Adam for complicity with his wife (see v. 2 below), shows that Abram and Sarai are repeating 'Eden's' sin of doubting the word of the Lord."

<sup>194</sup> These words are reminiscent of those in 3:17 ("Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife"). The significance is the same in both passages (see comments on 3:17 for the significance). Several have pointed out the many similarities between Genesis 3 (the account of the Fall) and Genesis 16, such as Hughes (p. 239, emphasis his), who writes: "Sarai's action was parallel to that of Eve. Here Abram *listened* to his wife (v. 2), just as Adam listened to his

physical relations with Abram, resulting in her conception (verse 4a). Hagar's conception caused friction between her and Sarai (verse 4b; cf. Genesis 30:1 and 1 Samuel 1:6-7) and between Sarai and Abram (verse 5; cf. Genesis 30:1-2), the former leading Hagar to flee<sup>196</sup> (verse 6b).<sup>197</sup>

### **16:7-16**

While on her way back to Egypt ("in the way to Shur," verse 7; cf. 1 Samuel 27:8), Hagar was met by "the angel of the LORD" (verse 7). This is the first of many appearances of this particular angel, not only in the book of Genesis (cf. 21:14-19, 22:9-18, and 31:13), but also throughout the Old Testament (cf. Exodus 3:1-4:17, Judges 2:1-5, 6:11-24, 13:3-23, 2 Samuel 24:15-16, 1 Kings 19:1-8, Isaiah 37:36, and Zechariah 3). The<sup>198</sup> angel of the LORD is the primary Christophany (a temporary, pre-incarnate appearance of Christ; from the Greek word for Christ, *Christos* + the Greek verb *phaino*, to appear) in the Old Testament. That this angel is no ordinary angel is seen by verse 10's "I will" (rather than "God will") and especially by the words of verse 13. The angel of the LORD instructed Hagar to return to Sarai (verse 9)<sup>199</sup>, promised her an innumerable number of descendants (verse 10; cf. 17:20 and comments on 15:5), told her the gender ("a son") and name ("Ishmael"<sup>200</sup>) of the child in her womb (verse 11), and told her what the child would be like (verse 12). Verse 12's "he shall dwell in the presence of" is, according to Hamilton (1:449), better rendered "in defiance

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(3:17). Here Sarai *took* Hagar (v. 3a), just as Eve took the fruit (3:6a). Here Sarai *gave* Hagar to her husband (v. 3b), just as Eve gave the fruit to hers (3:6b). And in both cases the man willingly and knowingly partook."

<sup>195</sup> Some translate "concubine" rather than "wife." Besides Abraham (Genesis 25:6), other famous Old Testament men who had concubines were: Jacob (Genesis 35:22); Gideon (Judges 8:31); Saul (2 Samuel 3:7 and 21:11); David (2 Samuel 5:13, 15:16, 16:21-22, 19:5, 20:3, and 1 Chronicles 3:9); Solomon (1 Kings 11:3); and Caleb (1 Chronicles 2:46 and 48).

<sup>196</sup> Interestingly, the name Hagar is Hebrew for "flight" (Davis, p. 188).

<sup>197</sup> Abram & Sarai learned the hard way that "foolishly to adopt worldly customs and expedients will only complicate matters and bring greater tensions" (Ross, p. 324).

<sup>198</sup> Generally speaking, when the definite article is used ("the angel"), Christ is in view. When the indefinite article is used ("an angel"), an average, everyday, garden-variety angel is in view.

<sup>199</sup> That Hagar did so is seen by Genesis 21:9-14.

<sup>200</sup> Ishmael means "God hears," from the Hebrew verb for hearing (*shama*) + the shortened form of God's name, Elohim (*El*). He was so named because the LORD heard the affliction of Hagar (verse 11). Hagar's "affliction" may not have been the harsh treatment she received from Sarai (verse 6), but infertility. According to Hamilton (1:449), whenever this Hebrew word is used in the Old Testament by or in reference to a woman, it always refers to barrenness (cf. Genesis 29:32 and 1 Samuel 1:11).

of” (cf. NIV: “he will live in hostility toward all his brothers”). Hagar recognized the One who spoke to her for who He really was (“the LORD that spake unto her”), calling Him “God” (verse 13a). Hagar was amazed that, after seeing the One who saw her, she was still alive (verse 13b). According to Exodus 33:20, no one can see God and live. This was the rule; however, God mercifully made some exceptions (besides here, see also Genesis 32:30, Judges 6:22-23, and 13:22-23).<sup>201</sup> In commemoration of the appearance of the angel of the LORD to Hagar, the well at which the appearance took place was named accordingly (verse 14; “Beerlahairoi,” meaning “Well of the One Who Lives and Sees Me”). The final verses of chapter 16 record the birth (verse 15a) and naming (verse 15b) of Ishmael, as well as Abram’s age at the time of Ishmael’s birth, 86 (verse 16).

The following chart on the angel of the Lord is taken from page 463 of Walton’s commentary on Genesis:

<i>Reference</i>	<i>Subject Matter</i>	<i>First-Person Speech Deity</i>	<i>Speaker Identified as (Worship)</i>	<i>Treated as Deity</i>
Gen. 16:7–14	Hagar	x	x	
Gen. 21:17–18	Hagar and Ishmael	x		
Gen. 22:11–18	Sacrifice of Isaac	x		
Gen. 31:10–13	Jacob instructed to return	x	x	
Ex. 3:2–6	Moses at the burning bush	x	x	
Num. 22:35; 23:5	Balaam	x		
Judg. 2:1–4	Indictment against Israel	x		
Judg. 6:11–24	Gideon	x	x	x
Judg. 13	Samson’s parents		x	x
Zech. 3	Investiture of Joshua	x	x	

### **17:1-8**

From the end of chapter 16 (see verse 16) to the start of chapter 17 (see verse 1), Moses fast-forwards 13 years. After more than a decade of (assumed) silence from

<sup>201</sup> Hamilton (1:449) translates verse 13b: “Have I really seen the back of him who sees me?” According to this translation, Hagar, like Moses in Exodus 33:23, merely saw the back of God. Apparently, one could see the back of God and still live.

heaven, it is reasonable to assume that Abram & Sarai wondered whether or when the fertility promise was going to be fulfilled. To reassure them, God reaffirms the covenant in chapter 17 (verses 2 and 7; cf. verses 19 and 21), reiterating both the fertility (verses 2-6; cf. verse 16) and land (verse 8) promises.

Significantly, when God appears to Abram, He identifies Himself as “Almighty God” (Hebrew *El Shaddai*<sup>202</sup>) (verse 1; cf. Exodus 6:3). The *El* in *El Shaddai* is the shortened form of the divine name, Elohim (on Elohim, see comments on 1:1). The *-ai* ending of *Shaddai* indicates that it is a plural, most likely a plural of majesty (cf. footnote 25). God reveals Himself to Abram by this name to assure Abram that He is able to fulfill the promises He is about to reiterate to him.<sup>203</sup> At the end of verse 1, God commands Abram to “walk before me, and be thou perfect.” To walk before God is metaphorical for behaving in a manner pleasing to God (S. R. Driver, cited in Ross, p. 331)<sup>204</sup>; this Abram did (see Genesis 24:40 and 48:15). To be perfect (cf. Deuteronomy 18:13) means to be without fault, complete, or whole (Ross, p. 331; cf. 6:9 and comments on). In response to God’s promise, Abram worshipped by falling on his face (verse 3), a sign of deep respect (Sailhamer, p. 138). As further confirmation of the fertility promise, God changes Abram’s name to Abraham (verse 5). The name Abram means “high father,” “exalted father” (Davis, p. 191), or “father of elevation” (Davis, p. 152).<sup>205</sup> The name Abraham means “father of a multitude” (verses 4 and 5) or “father of a great number” (Davis, p. 152).<sup>206</sup> Not only would Abraham be the father of many nations physically (through Isaac, Ishmael, et. al.), but also spiritually (cf. Luke 19:9, Romans 4:11-12, 16, and Galatians 3:6-9, and 29). The promise of verse 6a (“I will make thee exceeding fruitful”) finds its fulfillment in 47:27 (cf. Exodus 1:7). According to verse 6b, Abraham’s descendants would include kings (cf. 17:16 and 35:11). This looks forward, not only to

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<sup>202</sup> According to Davis (p. 190), *Shaddai* comes from the Hebrew verb *shadad*, meaning to be strong or powerful; Hamilton (1:462) defines it “to destroy, overpower.”

<sup>203</sup> “Of the six times [*El Shaddai*] is used in Genesis [17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 48:3, and 49:25], it is almost always connected with some divine blessing; the fulfillment of these blessings seems contingent on the power and omnipotence of God” (Davis, p. 190).

<sup>204</sup> Benno Jacob (quoted in Ross, p. 331), gives the denotation underlying the connotation: “The image is taken from the shepherd who walks behind his herd directing it by his calls [48:15], or from the father under whose eyes the child walks. It is more than the walking ‘with’ God of Enoch [5:22 and 24] and Noah [6:9] who were practically [led] by the hand.”

<sup>205</sup> Etymologically, Abram is derived from Hebrew *ab* (father) and Hebrew *ram* (exalted). “In the patriarch’s name, the element *ram* probably referred to Terah, for Abram was not yet a father. It would signify, ‘He is exalted with respect to father’; that is, he was of distinguished lineage and high birth” (Ross, p. 331).

<sup>206</sup> According to Davis (p. 191), Abraham is derived from Hebrew *ab* (father) and Arabic *ruham* (multitude). According to Ross (p. 332), it is derived from Hebrew *ab* (father) and Hebrew *hamon* (multitude).

the monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon, et. al.), but also to “the King of kings” (1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14, and 19:16; cf. the genealogy of Matthew 1). In verse 7, the Abrahamic covenant is called everlasting (cf. 17:13 and 19), a reaffirmation of its unconditional character (cf. comments on 15:17-18). Because the covenant itself is everlasting, so are its promises; thus, the land promise is an everlasting one (v. 8; cf. 13:15 and 48:4). For this reason, dispensational interpreters rightly contend that Israel will one day (during the millennial kingdom) possess the entirety of the Promised Land (cf. comments on 15:18b-21).

### **17:9-14**

Just as the rainbow was the sign of the Noahic covenant (9:12-17), so circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (17:11).<sup>207</sup> Though the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional, it was not without its responsibilities. In these verses, God stipulates that Abraham and his descendants keep the covenant by circumcising every male<sup>208</sup> among them (verses 9 and 10). Newborn males were to be circumcised when eight days old (verse 12). Every male member of a Jewish household was to be circumcised, whether a full-blooded Jew or not (verses 12 and 13). Those who refused to be circumcised were covenant breakers and were, thus, to be “cut off” (verse 14). There is some question as to exactly what this expression signifies. According to Ross (p. 334), “this expression appears to be a general threat of divine punishment that could come about in a number of ways.” According to Hamilton (1:474), this expression is more specific, meaning either excommunication or execution.

### **17:15-22**

Not only did God change the name of the patriarch (verse 5), but also the name of the matriarch (verse 15). Both Sarai and Sarah mean “princess.”<sup>209</sup> Why, then, was her name changed if the meaning remained the same? Perhaps to indicate a new significance behind the meaning (see verse 16’s “kings of people shall be of her”; cf. verse 6b and comments on). God promised Abraham that Sarah would have a son (verse 16), causing Abraham to fall on his face and laugh (verse 17). Most rightly see Abraham’s action as a lack of faith.<sup>210</sup> Abraham could not bring himself to believe that

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<sup>207</sup> While other nations practiced circumcision (see Jeremiah 9:25-26), for the Jews circumcision took on special significance, signifying their special relationship to God (see 17:7’s “to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” and 17:8’s “I will be their God”). Circumcision constantly reminded the Jews of their special status (see 17:13’s “my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant”).

<sup>208</sup> “The mark of the covenant is confined to the male descendant; the female has no corresponding mark. This lack may be attributed either to the heavily patriarchal structure of OT society, or to the OT teaching about the ‘one flesh’ principle in marriage. If two have become one there is need for a mark only on one” (Hamilton, 1:469-470).

<sup>209</sup> Davis (p. 192) makes a slight distinction, rendering Sarai “my princess” and Sarah “a princess.”

two individuals as elderly as he and his wife could possibly have a child<sup>211</sup> (verse 17); therefore (contrary to what he had just been told in verse 16), he believed Ishmael would be the son of the promise (verse 18). God corrected Abraham's misconception, telling Abraham that the son of the promise would not be Ishmael, but the yet-to-be-conceived Isaac (verse 19). While Ishmael, by virtue of being Abraham's son, would be richly blessed (verse 20; cf. 25:12-16), the covenant would continue through Isaac (verses 19 and 21; cf. 26:3), who would arrive a year later (verse 21; cf. 18:10 and 14).

### **17:23-27**

In faithful obedience (see verse 23's "as God had said unto him"; cf. 12:4), Abraham had himself and every male member of his household circumcised.<sup>212</sup> Notice the swiftness with which he obeyed, as seen by the fact that they were circumcised "in the selfsame day" (verses 23 and 26).<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> In 18:12, Sarah will also laugh at the prospect. God, however, will get the last laugh (21:6).

<sup>211</sup> That Abraham found this to be so incredible is somewhat of a mystery. He himself was born when his father was 130 years old (see footnote 147). Not only would Abraham have Isaac when he was 100 years old (21:5), but he would go on to have six more children (by Keturah, 25:1-2) when he was at least 137 years old (according to 23:1, Sarah lived to be 127; according to 17:17, Abraham was 10 years older than Sarah).

<sup>212</sup> Abraham was circumcised because he already was a believer; circumcision did not save him (cf. Romans 4:9-12). Though not everyone who was circumcised was saved, everyone who was saved was circumcised. "Like all covenantal signs, circumcision could easily become an empty ritual. It had to be coupled with faith to have genuine meaning. The performance of the rite simply meant that the participants were identified with the seed of Abraham. To be identified with the 'spiritual seed of Abraham' required that spiritual circumcision accompany the physical act, that is, that faith and commitment to the Lord be the motivation" (Ross, p. 333).

<sup>213</sup> True obedience involves not only doing all you're told to do (completely), but also doing it right away (quickly; "a slow obey is no obey") and with the right attitude (cheerfully).



## Lesson 11: Genesis 18-19

In Genesis chapters 18 and 19, the Abraham narrative (12:1-25:11) continues. While chapter 18 focuses on Abraham, chapter 19 focuses on Abraham's nephew, Lot. In the first half of chapter 18, the LORD appears to Abraham (verse 1) through "three men" (verse 2), to whom Abraham shows the utmost oriental hospitality (verses 4-8), to reiterate the promise made in 17:19 and 21 that Sarah would give birth to a son in a year (verses 10 and 14), a promise at which Sarah, like Abraham before her (in 17:17), faithlessly laughed (verses 12-15). In the last half of chapter 18, God tells Abraham about His intention to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (verses 17-21), prompting Abraham to intercede for them (verses 22-32). In chapter 19, two of the three "angels" (verse 1) who visited Abraham in chapter 18 arrive in Sodom, meet Lot, and accept Lot's invitation to stay with him (verses 1-3). The men of Sodom, driven by the perversion that has made them infamous ("sodomy"), came after Lot's guests, but were supernaturally restrained from reaching them (verses 4-11). After forcefully removing Lot, his wife, and two daughters from Sodom (verses 15-17) and relocating them (minus Lot's wife, verse 26) in Zoar (verses 18-22), God executed His promised judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (verses 24-25). After staying in Zoar for a time, Lot and his daughters fled to a cave in the mountains, where Lot and his daughters had incestuous relations, giving birth to two of Israel's enemies, the Moabites and the Ammonites (verses 30-38).

Chapters 18 and 19 present several contrasts: a contrast between the way Abraham treats his guests in chapter 18 and the way the men of Sodom treat the same guests (minus one) in chapter 19<sup>214</sup>; and a contrast between the message of life the visitors gave Abraham and Sarah in chapter 18 and the message of doom the visitors gave Lot in chapter 19.

### **18:1-15**

While Abraham was still residing in Hebron "in the plains of Mamre" (verse 1; cf. 13:18 and 14:13), the LORD, as on previous occasions (cf. 12:7 and 17:1), appeared to him (verse 1). According to verse 2, this appearance was in the form of "three men." There is some question as to precisely who these three were. While they are called "men" here (cf. 18:16, 22, 19:5, 8, 10, 12, and 16)<sup>215</sup>, they are called "angels" elsewhere (in 19:1 and 15).<sup>216</sup> While the fact that they ate (see 18:8 and 19:3) seems to imply that

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<sup>214</sup> Walton (*Genesis*, p. 483) calls the inhabitants of Sodom "hospitality challenged."

<sup>215</sup> As is more often the case than not when it comes to angelic appearances in Scripture, to human view angels appear to be mere human beings (no wings, halos, etc.), males in particular. The angels of Genesis 18 and 19 apparently looked like average human males. Though angels are spirit beings (Hebrews 1:14), they can temporarily take on human bodies, as evidenced by the fact that the angels in Genesis 18 and 19 ate (see 18:8 and 19:3).

<sup>216</sup> Assuming that the two spoken of in chapter 19 are two of the three spoken of in chapter 18.

they were mere mortals (however, see footnote 215), verses such as 18:9<sup>217</sup>, 10, 13, 14, 15, and 19:11 clearly indicate that they were supernatural beings.<sup>218</sup> Most are of the opinion that they were angels, with one of them being the angel of the LORD (i.e., Christ; see comments on 16:7). The two ordinary angels went on to Sodom (18:22a and 19:1-22), while the angel of the LORD stayed behind to converse with Abraham (18:22b-33).

Besides the precise identity of these visitors, another issue is the point at which Abraham in chapter 18 and Lot in chapter 19 recognized them for who they really were. Most are of the opinion that neither Abraham nor Lot realized the true identity of their guests until well after first meeting them.<sup>219</sup> While both Abraham (18:2-3<sup>220</sup>) and Lot (19:1-2) immediately showed reverence to their guests, such gestures were commonly made to men of distinction (cf. 23:7 and 12), Abraham and Lot apparently having judged these men to be so by their appearance, demeanor, etc.<sup>221</sup>

The hospitality Abraham showed his guests (verses 4-8) was typical of that day and region (cf. Genesis 19:2-3, 24:31-33a, and Judges 19:20-21) and was abundant<sup>222</sup> (verses 6-8).<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> “The visitors’ question, ‘Where is Sarah?’ was out of keeping with oriental custom, since strangers would neither know nor use a wife’s given name. The fact that they knew Sarah’s name indicated that they were not mere men ....” (Davis, p. 197).

<sup>218</sup> To this list could be added the following: “... [T]he ability of these two messengers to make the trip from Mamre, just north of Hebron (18:1) to Sodom (19:1, a journey of some forty miles that would normally take at least two days) in just several hours (from the midafternoon of 18:1 to the evening of 19:1) reinforces the supernatural nature of these messengers” (Hamilton, 2:30).

<sup>219</sup> A case of entertaining angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2).

<sup>220</sup> “Lord” in 18:3 need not necessarily be capitalized.

<sup>221</sup> Abraham apparently recognized the angel of the LORD for who He truly was by the end of the chapter (notice especially verses 25, 27, and 31). For Lot, the “cat was out of the bag” in 19:11. Commenting on this verse, Davis (p. 202) states: “If Lot had not realized before this miracle that his two visitors were no mere men, he certainly realized it then.”

<sup>222</sup> As seen, for example, by the amount of bread Abraham had Sarah bake (verse 6). “Sarah’s three seahs [KJV: “measures”] is a large amount, which will yield much more bread than the three visitors, Sarah, and Abraham can possibly eat” (Hamilton, 2:11).

<sup>223</sup> Calvin (2:470) bemoans the loss of such hospitality in his day: “But, at that time, there was greater honesty than is, at present, to be found amid the prevailing perfidy [faithlessness, disloyalty] of mankind; so that the right of hospitality might be exercised with less danger. Therefore, the great number of inns are evidence of our depravity, and prove it to have arisen from our own fault, that the principal duty of humanity has become obsolete among us.”

In verse 9 and following, the visitors reveal the reason for their visit, to reiterate, presumably for Sarah's benefit, the promise made to Abraham in 17:19 and 21 that Sarah would give birth to a son in a year (verses 10 and 14; cf. Romans 9:9).<sup>224</sup> Like Abraham in 17:17, Sarah faithlessly laughed at the prospect. Like Abraham (in 17:17), she thought it inconceivable (pun intended) that she could conceive, not only because of her age<sup>225</sup> (90 years old, 17:17) and the age of Abraham (100 years old, 17:17) (verses 11a and 12<sup>226</sup>), but also because she was postmenopausal (verse 11b<sup>227</sup>). God rightly rebuked Sarah for her unbelief, reminding her that nothing is too hard for the LORD (verse 14; cf. Luke 1:37). Sarah needed to be "fully persuaded that, what he [God] had promised, he was able also to perform" (Romans 4:21). According to Hebrews 11:11, she eventually did.<sup>228</sup> According to Genesis 21:1-2, God kept His promise.

### **18:16-33**

Just as the first half of chapter 18 can be summarized by the rhetorical question at the start of verse 14 ("Is anything too hard for the LORD?"), so the last half of the chapter can be summarized by the rhetorical question at the end of verse 25 ("Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?").

In the previous section (18:1-15), there are hints that one of Abraham's three visitors surpassed the other two (notice verses 1, 3, 10, and 13-15). As mentioned previously, most believe this One to have been the angel of the LORD (i.e., Christ). In this section, the hints continue almost nonstop (notice verses 20-33).

Having accomplished the first part of their mission (reiterating the fertility promise to Abraham & Sarah), Abraham's three guests set their sights on Sodom (verse 16) and the second part of their mission. In verses 17-19<sup>229</sup> (cf. Amos 3:7), God decides to tell

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<sup>224</sup> Other angelic visits foretelling the birth of a son are found in Judges 13:2-3 (Samson), Luke 1:8-13 (John the Baptist), and Luke 1:26-38 (Jesus).

<sup>225</sup> As far as the age factor goes, Sarah's age was the principal problem, seeing that Abraham fathered children after turning 137 years old (see footnote 211).

<sup>226</sup> According to A. A. McIntosh (cited in Ross, p. 344), the Hebrew word in verse 12 translated "pleasure" should be translated "conception." In 1 Peter 3:6, Peter takes note of the fact that Sarah calls Abraham "lord" here in verse 12.

<sup>227</sup> Hamilton (2:4) translates verse 11b: "Sarah had reached menopause."

<sup>228</sup> According to Romans 4:18-21, Abraham also repented of his initial unbelief in Genesis 17:17.

<sup>229</sup> While the last clause of verse 19 ("that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken about him") seems to call the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant (see comments on 15:17) into question, Ross (p. 350) answers this question by stating: "To live in conformity with the will of God (righteousness) and to make the right decisions based on his will

Abraham, His friend (2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8, and James 2:23) His intentions in regards to Sodom and Gomorrah. Verses 20 and 21 speak of the “cry” of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. 19:13, as well Genesis 4:10), which had come to the LORD (verse 21; cf. Jonah 1:2). In Scripture, this word is used to describe those who receive brutal punishment (Hamilton, 2:21); not only were these cities notorious for their sexual immorality (Genesis 19:4-5; cf. Jude 7), but also for their social immorality (cf. Ezekiel 16:48-50). In an instance of anthropomorphism [on anthropomorphism, see comments on 3:8], verse 21 says that God was going to go down (cf. Genesis 11:5) to verify whether or not the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was as it sounded. This verse “implies not that God was uninformed about what was going on in the city, but that He would handle the situation justly. He already knew the city was wicked (13:13), but He wanted to demonstrate that His decision to destroy it was fully justified and not arbitrary” (Davis, p. 198). Walton (*Genesis*, p. 475) adds: “... [A] fair judge sees the evidence firsthand.”

While the other two angels started for Sodom, the angel of the LORD remained behind (verse 22). Undoubtedly desiring to deliver his nephew, Lot from Sodom’s impending doom, Abraham intercedes<sup>230</sup> on behalf of Sodom<sup>231</sup> (verses 22-32), God agreeing to spare the city of Sodom if ten righteous people could be found in it (verse 32; cf. Jeremiah 5:1). While Abraham’s intercession failed to deliver Sodom (not even five could be found, let alone ten), it did succeed in delivering Lot and his immediate family (see 19:29).<sup>232</sup>

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(justice) now become the conditions for inheriting the *blessings* [emphasis mine] of the covenant.” In a similar vein, Calvin (2:483) speaks of these as consequences, not causes of the covenant. As mentioned previously (see comments on 17:9-14), though the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional, it was not without its responsibilities (cf. 17:1, 22:15-18, and 26:2-5).

<sup>230</sup> Verse 22’s “stood yet before the LORD” is an intercessory posture (cf. Psalm 106:23 and Jeremiah 15:1).

<sup>231</sup> This is the second time Abraham worked for the welfare of Lot and his fellow citizens, the first time being in chapter 14.

<sup>232</sup> In most cases, the presence of the righteous acts as a preservative (cf. Matthew 5:13’s “ye are the salt of the earth”), restraining God’s judgment (when the righteous are removed from the earth at the Rapture, this restraint will be removed, and all hell will literally break loose in the Tribulation). As Ross (p. 352) states: “... [T]he presence of the righteous in the world benefits the wicked because the justice of the Lord will not destroy the righteous with the wicked” (cf. Genesis 18:23-25). In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, this presence was not significant enough and/or the wickedness of its inhabitants was too great (see 19:13) to be overcome by such a presence. In answer to Abraham’s question in verse 25 (“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”), God removed the righteous (deliverance) prior to unleashing His judgment (destruction) on Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. the pretribulational rapture of the church). Note: The designations “deliverance” and “destruction” are from Ross (p. 355).

## **19:1-22**

The two angels that left Hebron for Sodom in 18:22 reached their destination on the evening of that same day (verse 1). When they arrived in Sodom, they were met at the gate of the city by Lot (verse 1). The fact that Lot “sat in the gate of Sodom” (verse 1) signifies that he held an influential position in the city, most likely that of a judge (cf. verse 9, as well as the following verses in their contexts: Deuteronomy 21:19, 22:15, 25:7, Joshua 20:4, and Ruth 4:1). Like Abraham before him (18:2-8), Lot paid homage to the angels (verses 1 and 2) and showed them great hospitality (verses 2-3), though with a much more meager meal (compare 18:6-8, including footnote 222, with 19:3). The men of Sodom, however, weren’t so hospitable. After surrounding Lot’s house (verse 4), they demanded that Lot turn his guests over to them so that they might have physical relations with them (verse 5).<sup>233</sup> Lot rightly rebuked them (verses 6 and 7), but in his zeal to protect his guests<sup>234</sup>, did the unthinkable, offering his daughters in their stead (verse 8; cf. the very similar incident in Judges 19:16-24, which did not have the fortunate ending this incident did; cf. Abraham’s failure to adequately protect the female under his care in 12:10-20 and 20:1-18). As in 12:10-20 (cf. footnote 157) and 16:1-6 (cf. footnote 193), the right end is desired (protection of guests), but the wrong means is used to accomplish it (offering of one’s daughters; the right means would have been, as footnote 234 indicates, sacrificing one’s life, not the purity of one’s daughters). Once again (cf. 12:10-20, where God inflicts Pharaoh’s household with plagues), God has to clean up the mess made by man (verses 10<sup>235</sup> and 11). The supernaturally-imposed “blindness” (“blinding flash,” Hamilton, 2:30) of verse 11 (cf. 2 Kings 6:18) was as much a mental blindness/blindness of the mind as it was a physical blindness/blindness of the eyes. Davis (p. 202) describes it as “mental confusion resulting from distorted vision.” Though physically and mentally impaired, the men of Sodom exhausted themselves<sup>236</sup> trying to reach the men inside Lot’s house (verse 11), testament to the intensity of their immorality/the depth of their depravity.

In verses 12 and 13, the angels warn Lot and his family to “flee from the wrath to come” (Matthew 3:7//Luke 3:7). Lot, in turn, warns his sons-in-law<sup>237</sup>, but to no avail (verse

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<sup>233</sup> Contrary to our culture, which calls homosexuality an “alternate lifestyle,” the Bible calls it an “abomination” (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13), unnatural (Romans 1:26 and 27), and “unseemly” (Romans 1:27; literally: “shameless deed”). Other biblical texts that condemn homosexuality include 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.

<sup>234</sup> Protection of one’s guests was a sacred duty in the ancient Near East. “When a man took in a stranger, he was bound to protect him, even at the expense of the host’s life” (Davis, p. 201).

<sup>235</sup> “In the end he who attempts to save his guests is saved by his guests” (Hamilton, 2:37).

<sup>236</sup> Hamilton (2:30) translates the end of verse 11: “... [S]o that they became exhausted trying to find the door.”

<sup>237</sup> That these men are called Lot’s sons-in-law (19:14), though his daughters are still virgins (19:8), likely implies that these men were betrothed to Lot’s daughters (so NASB and NIV). The

14).<sup>238</sup> In spite of two warnings to leave (one in verses 12-13 and a second one in verse 15<sup>239</sup>), Lot hesitated<sup>240</sup> to do so (verse 16), forcing the angels to forcibly remove Lot and his family from Sodom (verse 16<sup>241</sup>). Even after a third warning (verse 17's "head for the hills"), Lot still hesitated. Rather than fleeing as far and as fast from Sodom as he possibly could, Lot requested to reside in the nearby town of Zoar (verses 18-20), a request that God graciously granted (verses 21-22); consequently, the town of Zoar was mercifully spared God's judgment (verse 21b).<sup>242</sup>

### **19:23-29**

In justice, God totally destroys the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding area (verse 25; cf. Jude 7) by sending "brimstone and fire" (blocks of burning sulfur, Hamilton, 2:47; cf. NIV) from the sky (verse 24; cf. Psalm 11:6, Ezekiel 10:2, and 38:22). Let us learn the lesson they did not (2 Peter 2:6). In direct defiance of the divine directive of 19:17 ("look not behind thee"), Lot's wife "looked back" and, consequently, "became a pillar of salt" (verse 26; cf. Luke 17:32). It may be that her backwards glance allowed the advancing sulfur storm time to overtake her.<sup>243</sup> Why did Lot's wife look back? Certainly, it was an act of unbelief, a failure to take God at His word (19:17). It likely also indicated her longing for Sodom (cf. footnote 240).

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Jewish betrothal (somewhat analogous to our engagement period) made one husband and wife legally, even though the consummation of the marriage (i.e., physical relations) was yet future (cf. Matthew 1:18). What business did Lot's daughters have being engaged to men from Sodom?

<sup>238</sup> Unlike Noah, Lot failed to convince his entire family about the reality of the coming judgment. Perhaps this was due to the respective characters of the two men. Not only did Lot live in Sodom (Genesis 14:12), but apparently Sodom also lived in Lot (Genesis 19:1, 8, and 16). If so, the modern-day believer can learn this lesson from Lot: To the degree that we live like the world, to that degree our words of warning to the world will be ignored.

<sup>239</sup> While in verse 3, Lot urged the angels to stay in Sodom, in verse 15 the angels urge Lot to leave Sodom.

<sup>240</sup> Why did Lot hesitate? Had he developed such an affection/affinity for Sodom that he found it difficult to pull away? Was Lot "leaving his heart in San Francisco"? As Ross (p. 354) states: "The reader is ... surprised at how difficult it was to get Lot and his family out of Sodom [19:16], or to get the mentality of Sodom out of Lot's family" [Lot in 19:16, his wife in 19:26, and his daughters in 19:31-35].

<sup>241</sup> While in verse 10, the angels rescued Lot from the men of Sodom, in verse 16 they rescue him from himself.

<sup>242</sup> If I'm a Zoarite, I'm pumping Lot's hand big time at this point!

<sup>243</sup> "The narrator certainly depicts her as a person who, in pausing to look back, was stopped, trapped, and overcome by a sulphur cloud, either suddenly or gradually" (Hamilton, 2:48).

In verse 27, Abraham returns to the place where he had interceded for Sodom (cf. 18:22). Sailhamer (p. 157) captures the significance: "... [S]o we return to the perspective of Abraham to the place where he was at the time of the intercession to see a final glimpse of the effect of that prayer." Like the angels in 18:16, Abraham "looked toward Sodom ..." (verse 28) and, in so doing, saw the aftermath of the sulfur storm. Verse 29 gives the reason why God spared Lot; it was because "God remembered [cf. 8:1 and comments on] Abraham." Once again (cf. chapter 14), Abraham rescues his nephew. "Abraham is to Lot what the hypothetical righteous remnant (50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10; ch. 18) would have been to Sodom" (Hamilton, 2:49).

### **19:30-38**

For an unrevealed reason, Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar<sup>244</sup> and ended up "heading for the hills" after all, residing in a cave with his two daughters. In a scene faintly reminiscent of the incident in 9:20-27, Lot's daughters commit incest with their father<sup>245</sup> while he is intoxicated, resulting in the birth of Moab<sup>246</sup> (cf. Deuteronomy 2:9), father of the Moabites (verse 37), and Ben-ammi<sup>247</sup> (cf. Deuteronomy 2:19), father of the Ammonites (verse 38), peoples who would become thorns in Israel's side (see Deuteronomy 23:3-4, Judges 3:12-14, 11:4-33, 1 Samuel 11:1-11, 2 Samuel 10, and 2 Kings 3).

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<sup>244</sup> Perhaps Lot found the character of the inhabitants of Zoar to be much like that of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Jude 7) and feared that Zoar would become a "second Sodom" (Mathews, 2:245) and suffer the same fate.

<sup>245</sup> "Lot was able to take his daughters out of Sodom, but he was not able to take the philosophy of Sodom out of his daughters" (Davis, p. 206); "... [T]heir conduct was worthy of Sodom, and shows quite as much as their previous betrothal to men of Sodom, that they were deeply imbued with the sinful character of that city" (C. F. Kiel, cited in Sailhamer, p. 159). Davis (p. 207) gives the following practical pointer: "The story of Lot and his family should provide a sobering reminder that all of our decisions are significant, even that of where we live." While Lot's daughters might have had the right end in mind (verses 32 and 34), they certainly utilized the wrong means (cf. comments on 19:8).

<sup>246</sup> According to Hamilton (2:53), the name Moab means "water [i.e., seed, progeny] of the father."

<sup>247</sup> According to Hamilton (2:53), the name Ben-ammi means "son of my kinsman."

## Lesson 12: Genesis 20-22

In Genesis chapters 20-22, the Abraham narrative (12:1-25:11) continues. Chapter 20 is a virtual repeat of the incident back in 12:10-20. Chapter 21 begins with God, in keeping with the fertility promise, causing Sarah to conceive and give birth to Isaac (verses 1-8). Chapter 21 continues with the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael and their preservation by divine intervention (verses 9-21). Chapter 21 concludes with the making of a peace treaty between the Philistine king, Abimelech and Abraham (verses 22-34). In chapter 22, Moses tells the gripping story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac in obedience to God's command (verses 1-14). As a result, God reiterates the promises He had previously made to Abraham (verses 15-19; cf. 12:2-3, 15:5, 17:2, et. al.). Chapter 22 concludes with a brief genealogy of Abraham's brother, Nahor, a genealogy whose primary purpose is to inform the reader of the origin of Rebekah, who will later become Abraham's daughter-in-law (verses 20-24; cf. chapter 24).

### **20:1-18**

Chapter 20 begins with Abraham relocating from Hebron, his residence since 13:18 ("from thence," verse 1), to an area south of Hebron ("toward the south country," verse 1; cf. comments on 12:9) between Kadesh and Shur. From there, he sojourns in Gerar (verse 1), a Philistine city. The last time Abraham journeyed in this southern area and sojourned in a foreign place, in 12:10-20, he told a half-truth about his half-sister/wife, Sarai, ultimately jeopardizing the fertility promise. In what can be described as nothing less than history repeating itself, Abraham does the same here in chapter 20.

Unlike the sojourn of chapter 12, precipitated by a famine in the land of promise (12:10), Moses does not indicate what, if anything, precipitated the sojourn of chapter 20.<sup>248</sup> Abraham and Sarah used the same subterfuge as before (verses 2a and 5a; cf. 12:11-13) with the same unintended consequence (verse 2b; cf. 12:14-15). Just as Egypt's Pharaoh took Sarai into his harem in chapter 12, so Abimelech<sup>249</sup>, king of the Philistines (26:8) took Sarah into his harem in chapter 20. According to chapter 12, Sarai's attractiveness is what attracted the attention of Pharaoh's officials. If one assumes that this is what attracted Abimelech's attention, the beauty of Sarah is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that she was ninety years old at this time (cf. footnote 159). As in chapter 12, God intervenes to save the day/clean up the mess made by man. God spoke to Abimelech in a dream<sup>250</sup>, threatening him with death for taking

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<sup>248</sup> Davis (p. 209) suggests that "[Abraham's] flocks may have exhausted the grazing areas [in Hebron], or political changes may have interrupted the peace." Calvin (2:520-521) suggests that Hebron's topography may have been adversely affected by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or that Abraham was driven out by persecution.

<sup>249</sup> Like "Pharaoh," "Abimelech" was apparently a dynastic title, not a proper name (Davis, p. 211; cf. 26:8). The "melech" in Abimelech most likely comes from the Hebrew word for king, *melek*.



another man's wife (verse 3).<sup>251</sup> Due to a divinely-imposed restraint (verse 6b<sup>252</sup>), Abimelech did not "come near" (verse 4; cf. Leviticus 18:6, 14, 19, Deuteronomy 22:14, and Isaiah 8:3) or "touch" (verse 6; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1), i.e., have physical relations with, Sarah. Because Abimelech had sinned ignorantly in this matter (verses 4b-6a), God did not take his life; however, if Abimelech, no longer ignorant, retained Sarah, God would not only take the life of Abimelech, but also the lives of those around him (verse 7; cf. Hebrews 13:4's "adulterers God will judge").

Though Abraham thought the people of Gerar weren't God fearing (verse 11), he missed his guess. Abimelech and his servants took God's warning to heart (verse 8; cf. the response of the Ninevites in Jonah 3).<sup>253</sup> Like Pharaoh in 12:18-19a, Abimelech took Abraham to task (verses 9-10). Notice how in verse 9 Abimelech calls adultery "a great sin" (cf. Genesis 39:9, where Joseph calls it a "great wickedness"); how times have changed! According to Abraham, his fear for his life (verse 11b; cf. 12:12-13), coupled with his false guess that the folks in Gerar didn't fear God (verse 11a), led him to lie about his relationship with Sarah. While there was some truth to the fact that Sarah was Abraham's sister<sup>254</sup> (verse 12), it was not the whole truth; Abraham gave the

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<sup>250</sup> In times past, God spoke "in divers manners" (Hebrews 1:1). One way was by dreams (cf. Genesis 31:24; Genesis 40 & 41; Daniel 4; and Matthew 2:13). Now that we have (and have had since the end of the first century A.D.) the complete canon of Scripture, God no longer gives special revelation through dreams, etc. The special revelation of His Word is sufficient (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

<sup>251</sup> "To take the wife of another man, even if done innocently enough, is a life-and-death issue. God would not tolerate it" (Ross, p. 374).

<sup>252</sup> Notice how this verse says "against me," rather than "against Sarah" and/or "against Abraham." Sin is an offense committed first and foremost against God. This truth is seen also in the following texts: Joseph's words in Genesis 39:9 ("How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"), Moses' words to the Reubenites and Gadites in Numbers 32:23 ("But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD"), Samuel's words in 1 Samuel 12:23 ("God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you"), David's words in 2 Samuel 12:13 ("I have sinned against the LORD") and in Psalm 51:4 ("Against thee, thee only, have I sinned"), the prodigal son's words in Luke 15:18 ("I have sinned against heaven"), and Peter's words to Ananias in Acts 5:4 ("Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God").

<sup>253</sup> Commenting on verse 8, Hamilton (2:67) states: "Abimelech could have furtively [secretly] returned Sarah to Abraham and avoided embarrassment. Who wants to admit publicly that he has been tricked? His willingness to be open and tell the truth contrasts with Abraham and his subterfuge [deception]."

<sup>254</sup> Later, the Law would implicitly forbid marriage to a half-sibling (see Leviticus 18:9, 11, 20:17, and Deuteronomy 27:22; cf. Ezekiel 22:11).

impression that Sarah was his sister and no more. While we know of “only” two times Abraham and Sarah used this ruse, there may have been others (verse 13).

Besides giving Sarah back to Abraham (verse 14b), Abimelech also compensated the couple (verses 14a, 15-16a<sup>255</sup>). The thousand pieces of silver Abimelech paid out (verse 16a) was specifically designed to clear Sarah (verse 16b). “... [T]he covering of the eyes’ ... may carry the idea of a justification of her honor in the eyes of those who would know of the situation” (Ross, p. 373); “The eyes of any of Sarah’s acquaintances will be blind to any sexual misconduct on her part” (Hamilton, 2:70); “Here, the phrase applies to those who accompany Sarah, prohibiting them from disparaging looks, for their eyes are deprived from seeing her shame” (Mathews, 2:258).

Earlier (in verse 7), God told Abimelech that Abraham was a “prophet” and would, therefore, intercede for Abimelech, lest he and his household die. In verses 17-18, Abraham intercedes for them (cf. Abraham’s intercession for Sodom at the end of chapter 18), with the result that the divinely-inflicted barrenness the females in Abimelech’s household suffered “because of Sarah Abraham’s wife”<sup>256</sup> (verse 18; cf. the plagues of 12:17) was removed.<sup>257</sup>

As did the incident in chapter 12, so the incident here in chapter 20 seriously jeopardizes the fulfillment of the fertility promise. Once again, in spite of man’s unfaithfulness, God remains faithful to His promises, directly intervening to preserve the marriage of Abraham & Sarah and, thus, make the fulfillment of the fertility promise possible.

## **21:1-8**

Chapter 20 having ended with the barren wombs of Abimelech’s household being reopened, chapter 21 begins with the “grand opening” of Sarah’s barren womb. The 25-year wait<sup>258</sup> was finally over! The chapter opens by saying that the LORD “visited” Sarah (verse 1). The Hebrew verb for “visit” has a wide range of meaning.<sup>259</sup> It can

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<sup>255</sup> What Mathews (2:259) calls settling with Abraham & Sarah out of court. Notice that in verse 16a Abimelech says “thy brother,” rather than “thy husband.” Hamilton (2:70) states regarding this: “The biting irony is hard to miss.”

<sup>256</sup> This divinely-inflicted infertility, due to nothing more than Abimelech’s sin of ignorance, shows how seriously God takes the sin of adultery (cf. comments on verses 3 and 9 above).

<sup>257</sup> As mentioned in footnote 193, God’s cure for barrenness in that day was prayer. In addition to making use of all the medicinal means God in His common grace has given to mankind today to fight infertility, let us not lose sight of the means of prayer.

<sup>258</sup> From the time Abraham was 75 years old (12:4) to the time he was 100 years old (21:5).

<sup>259</sup> According to Ross (p. 378), the verb “describes a divine intervention in someone’s life that shapes or alters destiny.” According to Sailhamer (p. 164), it is “used in contexts where the

have the positive connotation of visiting to bless (as here; cf. Genesis 50:24, Ruth 1:6, Psalm 8:4, 65:9, and Jeremiah 29:10) or the negative connotation of visiting to judge (see Exodus 20:5 and 32:34). The Lord blessed Sarah by opening her womb (cf. 1 Samuel 2:21 and Luke 1:68, where “visit” is used in similar situations). God did so “as he had said”/“as he had spoken” (verse 1; cf. 17:16 and 19) “at the set time of which God had spoken” (verse 2; cf. 18:10 and 14); God keeps His word! In obedience to God’s command, Abraham named his son Isaac (verse 3; cf. 17:19) and had him circumcised (verse 4; cf. 17:9-13). Whereas once Sarah’s laughter was one of doubt (18:12), now it was one of delight (verse 6).<sup>260</sup> Sarah’s laughter in 21:6, like the earlier laughter of her (18:12) and Abraham (17:17), is inextricably bound up in the name given to her son, Isaac, meaning “he laughs.” To celebrate Isaac’s weaning<sup>261</sup>, Abraham “made a great feast” (verse 8).

### **21:9-21**

In an incident reminiscent of the one in chapter 16, Hagar is driven away from Abraham & Sarah into the wilderness, this time for good, and has an encounter with the angel of the LORD. While in chapter 16 the precipitating factor was Hagar’s conception of Ishmael, here in chapter 21 the precipitating factor was Ishmael’s “mocking” (verse 9). While verse 9 does not tell us the object of Ishmael’s scorn, Paul in Galatians 4:29 does, stating that Ishmael “persecuted” Isaac. What form this persecution took is left unstated.<sup>262</sup> Whatever it was, Sarah was sufficiently upset by it to demand that Abraham expel Hagar and Ishmael and disinherit Ishmael (verse 10; cf. Galatians 4:30). Though the prospect of parting with Hagar and Ishmael caused Abraham great grief (verses 11-12a), God instructed Abraham to do what Sarah was suggesting<sup>263</sup> (verse

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focus is on God’s attentive care and concern.” In this sense, it is roughly synonymous with the Hebrew verb translated “remember” in 8:1 and 19:29 (see comments on 8:1).

<sup>260</sup> Hamilton (2:72) translates verse 6: ““God has made a joke of me; whoever hears will laugh at me.””

<sup>261</sup> According to Hamilton (2:77), Isaac could have been as much as three years old, or even older, at this point.

<sup>262</sup> Hamilton (2:78) states in this regard: “It has long been a source of curiosity as to what Ishmael was actually doing.” Based on the fact that the same verb can be used to describe sexual behavior (as in Genesis 26:8), Hamilton (2:78) suggests that Ishmael may have molested Isaac. Most, however, see this as being some form of verbal abuse (the verb is so used in Job 30:1, Psalm 2:4, 59:8, and Habakkuk 1:10), perhaps occasioned by the occasion (verse 8). Calvin (2:542) calls it “a malignant expression of scorn, by which the forward youth manifested his contempt for his infant brother.” Likewise, Davis (p. 213) comments: “The intensive form of the participle here indicates that this was not simple laughter but ‘ridicule.’”

<sup>263</sup> Whereas previously in Genesis both Adam (in 3:17) and Abraham (in 16:2) improperly listened to a wifely suggestion, this time God gives Abraham the go ahead to do so.

12b). To reassure Abraham, God promises him that He would make a nation of Ishmael (verse 13), thus guaranteeing Ishmael's survival.

Early the next morning<sup>264</sup>, Abraham gave Hagar and Ishmael some bread and bottled water and sent them away (notice "sent her away" in verse 14 versus "cast out" in verse 10) to wander<sup>265</sup> in the wilderness (i.e., desert) of Beersheba (verse 14). When their supply of water ran out, Hagar left Ishmael under a bush to die (verses 15-16).<sup>266</sup> In light of what the angel of the Lord had promised Hagar back in 16:10-12, one wonders what she was thinking at this point: Would God's promise fail? Just as God would later provide for the Israelites during their wandering in the wilderness, so He provided for Hagar and Ishmael during theirs. In keeping with the meaning of Ishmael's name (see footnote 200), "God heard the voice of the lad" (verse 17). As in the chapter 16 incident, "the angel of God" (also known as "the angel of the LORD") i.e., Christ (see comments on 16:7), communicated with Hagar. While in chapter 16, He appeared to Hagar in person, here in chapter 21 He speaks to her from heaven (verse 17). The angel of God told Hagar in verse 18 what God had told Abraham back in verse 13 (thus equating the angel with God), namely, that He would make a nation of Ishmael. Before Ishmael could realize his destiny, however, he desperately needed a drink.<sup>267</sup> Thus, God enabled Hagar to see a nearby well of water (verse 19). Just as God had promised back in 16:12, Ishmael went on to live in the wilderness (verses 20-21a). Not surprisingly, Hagar found a wife for her son in her homeland (verse 21b).

### **21:22-34**

Chapter 21 concludes with the account of a covenant made between Abimelech and Abraham (verses 27 and 32a). Abimelech, accompanied by the commander of his army, Philcol, approached Abraham with the idea. Abimelech and Philcol recognized that God was with Abraham (verse 22; cf. Genesis 21:20, 39:2, 21, Psalm 46:7, and 11). Abimelech made Abraham promise him with an oath that he would not do to him or to his descendants what he did to him back in chapter 20 (verse 23).<sup>268</sup> After agreeing

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<sup>264</sup> Apparently, Abraham was an early riser (cf. 19:27 and 22:3). Hamilton (2:82) comments on the possible significance of Abraham's early rise in 21:14: "Abraham's early rise is not dictated by eagerness to get Hagar out of the house. Either he wants to do this farewell, however reluctantly, as privately as possible, or else he wants Hagar to be able to spend at least the first part of her day of exile in the cool of the morning."

<sup>265</sup> P. Tribble (cited in Hamilton, 2:83) says of the Hebrew verb translated "wander": "In reference to physical movement, [it] connotes uncertainty, lack or loss of direction, and even destitution."

<sup>266</sup> Ishmael was a teen at this time (at least 14, based on a comparison of 17:24-25 and 21:5; based on 21:8 [cf. footnote 261], Ishmael may have been as old as 17—so Davis, p. 213).

<sup>267</sup> The designations "destiny" and "drink" are those of Hamilton (2:84).

to Abimelech's proposal (verse 24), Abraham made his, requesting that Abimelech recognize Abraham's rightful ownership of a well Abimelech's servants had taken from Abraham (verses 25-26 and 28-30). In light of this stipulation, Abraham named the place where they met Beersheba (verse 31).<sup>269</sup> The name Beersheba is derived either from the Hebrew word for seven ("well of seven"), based on the seven ewe lambs of verses 28-30, or from the Hebrew word for oath ("well of oath"), based on the oath the two men entered into that day (verse 31).<sup>270</sup> Abraham further marked the occasion by planting a tree and by calling on the name of the LORD (verse 33; for the significance of the latter, see comments on 4:26).

## **22:1-14**

Though Abraham made the Hebrews 11 "hall of faith" (see Hebrews 11:8-10 and 17-19), his faith wavered on many occasions (see 12:10-20, 15:7-8 and comments on, 16:1-4a, 17:15-19, and chapter 20). For the most part, however, it remained strong (see 12:1-5, 13:8-9 and comments on, and 15:6). Never did its strength display itself more powerfully than in the gripping account of this section<sup>271</sup>, as Abraham, having just said goodbye to his other son in chapter 21, in simple obedience to God's command, attempts to sacrifice the very son through whom God promised to make Abraham a great nation, believing that, if necessary, God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill the fertility promise (see Hebrews 11:17-19).

Unlike Abraham, who is not told until after the fact (see verse 12), the reader is told that what is about to transpire is a test<sup>272</sup> of Abraham's faith (verse 1; cf. the story of Job for a similar phenomenon). Abraham's submissive spirit, evident throughout this passage, is seen right away in verse 1. The Hebrew phrase translated "here I am" "in response to a call, indicates the readiness of the person addressed to listen or obey" (BDB<sup>273</sup>, p. 244; cited in Hamilton, 2:97; cf. Exodus 3:4, 1 Samuel 3:4-6, 8, and Isaiah 6:8). God

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<sup>268</sup> "Ideally, believers should be trustworthy so that they do not need to swear that they are telling the truth [see Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12], but such is not always the case" (Ross, pp. 389-390).

<sup>269</sup> "The point of the commemorative naming is that it would preserve for future generations the record of how that property was secured" (Ross, pp. 388-389).

<sup>270</sup> The inconclusiveness is based on the fact that the Hebrew words for "seven" and "oath" have the same consonants (but not the same vowels). The original Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament had only consonants. Thus, one must discern from the context which word is the better choice. The context, however, supports both options.

<sup>271</sup> "Few narratives in Genesis can equal this story in dramatic tension" (Sailhamer, p. 169).

<sup>272</sup> The KJV translation "tempt" is potentially misleading, especially in light of James 1:13.

<sup>273</sup> BDB is the abbreviation for the well-known Hebrew lexicon (dictionary) of Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs.

gives Abraham an extraordinary order in verse 2: “Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” As in 12:1 (see comments on), through the use of words signifying increasingly deeper levels of intimacy (based on order in the original: “thy son” ... “thine only son, whom thou lovest”<sup>274</sup> ... “Isaac”), God heightens the price Abraham has to pay to obey His command.<sup>275</sup> In words reminiscent of 12:1<sup>276</sup>, God tells Abraham to go to one of the mountains in the land of Moriah<sup>277</sup>, without telling him which mountain (compare 12:1’s “a land that I will shew thee” with 22:2’s “one of the mountains which I will tell thee of”).

Abraham obeyed (verse 3; cf. 12:4) and without delay (verse 3’s “early in the morning”<sup>278</sup>; cf. comments on 17:23 and 26). In Abraham’s words to his servants in verse 5 (“I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you”), we see a hint of what the writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 11:17-19, namely, that Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill the fertility promise. The moment of truth came as Abraham and Isaac “came to the place which God had told

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<sup>274</sup> Abraham was heartbroken over the thought of losing Ishmael (Genesis 21:11). One can only image how much more so he was over the thought of losing Isaac.

<sup>275</sup> “The intensity of the test is magnified by the three direct objects of the imperative: *your son, your precious son whom you love, Isaac*. Each of the objects hits a little closer to home, as the list moves from the general to the more intimate. This specification is precisely what we encountered when God first spoke to Abraham: ‘Leave your country, your homeland, your father’s house’ (12:1), that is, an imperative followed by a series of gradually intensifying terms” (Hamilton, 2:102).

<sup>276</sup> “In using the terminology of Genesis 12:1-3, God may have been reminding the patriarch of the original promissory call in order to encourage his obedience” (Ross, pp. 396-397).

<sup>277</sup> Mount Moriah would later become the location for the building of the Solomonic temple (2 Chronicles 3:1), as well as (according to Benware, p. 43) the place where Christ was crucified: “It is worth noting that the geographic location for this drama of sacrifice, Mount Moriah, was the same spot where two thousand years later God would sacrifice His Son, Jesus, for the sins of the world.”

<sup>278</sup> “This promptitude shows the greatness of Abraham’s faith. Innumerable thoughts might come into the mind of the holy man; each of which would have overwhelmed his spirit, unless he had fortified it by faith. And there is no doubt that Satan, during the darkness of the night, would heap upon him a vast mass of cares. Gradually to overcome them, by contending with them, was the part of heroic courage. But when they were overcome, then immediately to gird himself to the fulfillment of the command of God, and even to rise early in the morning to do it, was a remarkable effort. Other men, prostrated by a message so dire and terrible, would have fainted, and have lain torpid, as if deprived of life; but the first dawn of morning was scarcely early enough for Abraham’s haste” (Calvin, 2:567).

him of” (verse 9). Abraham did not hesitate<sup>279</sup>, nor did Isaac resist<sup>280</sup> (verses 9-10). Just as Abraham was about to plunge the knife into Isaac (verse 10), “the angel of the LORD [for the identity of the angel of the LORD, see comments on 16:7] called unto [Abraham<sup>281</sup>] out of heaven” (verse 11; cf. 21:17), telling him, “Lay not thine hand against the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God [cf. James 2:21-24<sup>282</sup>], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son [cf. Genesis 22:2 and 16], from me”<sup>283</sup> (verse 12). Abraham passed the test. “Although the commandment was to sacrifice Isaac as an offering to the Lord, the real point of the act was Abraham’s sacrifice of himself, that is, of his will and his wisdom with regard to his son Isaac” (Ross, p. 393).

Earlier, Abraham told Isaac: “God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (verse 8). While God did not provide a lamb, He did provide a ram, which Abraham offered “in the stead of his son” (verse 13), a beautiful picture of the vicarious/substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on behalf of sinners (see Isaiah 53:5a, 6b, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 15:3b, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Galatians 3:13, Ephesians 5:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 5:10, Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 2:24a, and 3:18a). To commemorate the occasion, Abraham named the location Jehovah-jireh, meaning “the LORD will provide” (verse 14).<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> “At the moment of truth Abraham did not look around for an animal or wait hesitatingly for God to intervene; he raised his hand to slay his son” (Ross, p. 399).

<sup>280</sup> If Isaac was old enough to physically overpower his father, his willingness to be bound is all the more remarkable. According to Jewish tradition, Isaac was 37 years old at the time (Hamilton, 2:100).

<sup>281</sup> The two-fold repetition of Abraham’s name (“Abraham, Abraham”) signified urgency (Hamilton, 2:111). See Exodus 3:4, 1 Samuel 3:10, and Acts 9:4 for the same phenomenon.

<sup>282</sup> On the surface, James 2:21-24 seems to contradict Romans 3:20, 28, 4:1-2, and Galatians 2:16. However, James and Paul are speaking of two different things. Paul is speaking of *pre*-conversion works, James of *post*-conversion works. Paul is speaking of *saving* faith, James of *sanctifying* faith. Paul is speaking of a *declaration* of righteousness, James a *demonstration* of righteousness. Paul is focusing on Genesis 15, James on Genesis 22. James is speaking of “works not as a merit for salvation but as a mark of salvation” (Hamilton, 2:121).

<sup>283</sup> Just as Abraham was willing to give up Ishmael, simply because God said so (Genesis 21:12-14), so he was willing to give up Isaac. “The principle of sacrifice is thereby revealed here, for God does not ask worshipers to give him that which they do not treasure or that which they no longer care for or need. Rather, God requires that his worshipers offer him the best that they have ...” (Ross, p. 402).

<sup>284</sup> “The act of naming preserved in the memory of the people the incident that occurred here ...” (Ross, p. 400).

### **22:15-19**

Because Abraham did what God told him (verses 16 and 18), God, in the person of the angel of the LORD, again spoke to Abraham from heaven (verse 15; cf. 22:11), reiterating the promises He had previously made to him (verses 17-18; cf. 12:2-3, 15:5, 17:2, et. al.). With the ultimate oath, swearing by Himself (cf. Hebrews 6:13-14), God once again (cf. 15:9-21) left no doubt that these promises would be fulfilled (verse 16).

### **22:20-24**

Beginning with 22:20, “the writer [Moses] signals a change in the direction of the narratives. Now that Abraham had proven faithful, attention would begin to turn to the next generation” (Ross, p. 405). In the closing verses of chapter 22, Moses gives the genealogy of Abraham’s brother, Nahor, the primary purpose of which is to inform the reader of the origin of Rebekah, who in chapter 24 would become Abraham’s daughter-in-law/Isaac’s wife.



## Lesson 13: Genesis 23:1-25:11

In Genesis 23:1-25:11, the Abraham narrative (12:1-25:11) comes to a close. At the start of chapter 23, Sarah, the mother/matriarch of Israel dies at the age of 127 (verses 1-2). Most of chapter 23 records Abraham's negotiations with the Hittites to buy a cave in which to bury his deceased wife (verses 3-18), which he does at the end of the chapter (verse 19). In chapter 24, Abraham commissions his senior servant (Eliezer?) to travel to the Haran region to find a wife for his son, Isaac (verses 1-9). God providentially leads the servant to Rebekah, Abraham's great niece (verses 10-27). After receiving the consent of Rebekah's family (verses 28-60), the servant takes Rebekah to Canaan to marry Isaac (verses 61-67). At the start of chapter 25, Moses partially traces one branch of Abraham's family tree, through Keturah (verses 1-4). The sons of Keturah, however, like the son of Hagar, would in no way threaten Isaac's hold on the inheritance (verses 5-6; cf. 17:19-21 and 21:10-12). The Abraham narrative ends with the recording of Abraham's death at the age of 175 (25:7-10) and the inference that the promises made to Abraham were conveyed to Isaac (25:11).

### **23:1-20**

Apparently, Abraham had relocated from Beersheba (22:19) back to Hebron (where he lived from 13:18 to 20:1), as Sarah dies in Hebron<sup>285</sup> (verse 2) at the age of 127 (verse 1). Interestingly, “[Sarah] is the only woman whose age at death is recorded in Scripture, and this indicates her importance” (Davis, p. 219). Conceivably, Abraham could have had Sarah buried back in Haran, or even Ur. However, in keeping with the land promise (made in 12:7, et. al.), Abraham by faith sought to secure a piece of property within the confines of the Promised Land in which to bury Sarah<sup>286</sup> (cf. Jacob's same concern in 47:29-30 and Joseph's in 50:25). To that end, Abraham approached the sons of Heth (also known as the Hittites) about buying some land from them (verses 3-4).<sup>287</sup> Because of their high esteem for Abraham<sup>288</sup>, the Hittites were more than

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<sup>285</sup> In verse 2, Moses gives both the name of the city at the time of Sarah's death, Kirjath-arba, and the name of the city in his day, Hebron (cf. Genesis 35:27, Joshua 14:15, 15:13, 54, and Judges 1:10).

<sup>286</sup> “The inclusion of the genealogy of Nahor just prior to this chapter reminds the reader that the ancestral home was in the east; but the account of the burial in the Land of Promise informs the reader that there was no going back for Abraham” (Ross, p. 408). “The very fact that Abraham buried Sarah in the land of Canaan is proof of his unwavering faith. Knowing that his descendants would have to endure four hundred years of bitter bondage in a foreign country (15:13), he looked beyond that to the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise” (Davis, p. 223).

<sup>287</sup> According to Davis (p. 222), the Hebrew verb translated “give” in verse 4 should be understood as “sell” (cf. verses 9 and 13).

<sup>288</sup> The Hittites called Abraham “lord” and a “mighty prince” (verse 6), literally a “prince of God” in Hebrew. “... [T]he Hebrews give a divine title to anything which excels. Therefore we

willing to do business with him (verses 5-6). Apparently, Abraham already had his eye on the cave of Machpelah<sup>289</sup> (verse 9), which belonged to a man named Ephron (verse 8). Ephron offered to give Abraham the cave for free, and not only the cave, but also the field in which it was found (verses 10-11), an offer that Abraham refused (verse 13; cf. his refusal to accept the spoils in 14:21-23). Abraham reiterated (as in verse 9) his resolve to pay the full price (verse 13; cf. David's similar insistence in 2 Samuel 24:21-24//1 Chronicles 21:22-25). Ephron named his price (verse 15<sup>290</sup>), which Abraham paid (verse 16).<sup>291</sup> Thus, Abraham took possession (verses 17-18, and 20<sup>292</sup>) of the only piece of the Promised Land he would ever own. Abraham buried Sarah in the cave of Machpelah (verse 19). This cave later became the burial site of Abraham (25:9-10); Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah (49:29-32); and Jacob//Israel (50:13).<sup>293</sup>

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are to understand by the expression, 'a prince of God,' a person of great and singular excellency" (Calvin, 2:580).

<sup>289</sup> Machpelah was apparently a place (Genesis 23:17), in which there was a field (Genesis 49:30), in which there was a cave (Genesis 23:9 and 25:9). Commenting on the possible meaning and significance of the name Machpelah, Hamilton (2:125) states: "Machpelah may be connected with the Hebrew root *kpl*, meaning "double" (a double cave, or a cave in which couples were buried?)." Calvin (2:582) translates the Hebrew word "double cave."

<sup>290</sup> Based on the word order at the end of verse 15 (literally "your deceased one bury"), in comparison to the word order at the end of verse 11 (literally "bury your deceased one"), Hamilton (2:135) is of the opinion that "Ephron plays a bit on Abraham's emotions," explaining: "The shift in order in v. 15 draws attention to Abraham the widower. Surely 400 shekels is a minuscule amount for one to pay for a piece of land in which to inter one's beloved spouse."

<sup>291</sup> Regarding the price Abraham paid, 400 shekels of silver, Davis (p. 223) states: "The four hundred shekels Abraham was forced to pay for the land were far more than it was worth. The price has been estimated in American currency at \$116 [Davis wrote these words in 1975], which may seem modest enough to us but in the ancient Near East was clearly exorbitant." According to Walton (*Genesis*, p. 529), 400 shekels of silver was equivalent to a lifetime of wages for a common laborer. "The piece of property was no bargain for Abraham; 400 shekels would be more than a hundred pounds of silver. David paid only one-eighth that amount—50 shekels of silver—for the purchase of the temple site from Araunah (2 Sam. 24:24). Jeremiah paid 17 shekels of silver for his cousin's field in Anathoth (Jer. 32:9)" (Hamilton, 2:135). Abraham was determined to bury Sarah in the Land of Promise, even if he had to overpay to do so.

<sup>292</sup> Verse 20 seems somewhat anticlimactic, following Sarah's burial in verse 19. This may be Moses' way of drawing the reader's attention one final time to the ultimate significance of the chapter—not Sarah's death, but Abraham's faith, evidenced by the trouble he went through to ensure that Sarah was buried in the Land of Promise.

<sup>293</sup> One notable omission is Rachel, who was buried "in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem" (35:19).

## **24:1-9**

In order for the fertility promise to stay on track, Isaac needed a son. In order to have a son, he first needed a wife. Chapter 24 tells the story of how God providentially brought Isaac & Rebekah together, leading to the birth of Jacob and the continued fulfillment of the fertility promise.

Chapter 24 opens by noting that Abraham was “old, and well stricken in age” (verse 1a). By comparing 21:5 (Abraham 100 years old when Isaac is born) with 25:20 (Isaac 40 years old when he marries Rebekah), one can surmise that Abraham was 140 years old at this time. Just as He had promised Abraham 65 years earlier (compare the previous sentence with 12:4) back in 12:2 (“I will bless thee”), “the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things” (verse 1b). These blessings included a prolonged and pleasant life (25:7-8) and material prosperity (24:35). Most likely due to the undesirable character of and the divine curse upon (see Genesis 9:25) the current occupants of Canaan (verse 3), Abraham decided to find a wife for Isaac in his homeland (verse 4). Most likely due to his age (verse 1), Abraham didn’t make the trip to Mesopotamia himself. Instead, he commissioned his senior servant, presumably Eliezer (see 15:2), to travel there, entrusting him with the task of finding a wife for Isaac.<sup>294</sup> Not only did Abraham forbid Eliezer from finding a wife for Isaac among the Canaanites (verse 3), but he also forbade him from taking Isaac out of the Promised Land (verses 5-6<sup>295</sup>). Though Abraham was confident that God would provide the needed wife at this time (verse 7; cf. 22:8), he was not presumptuous in the matter (verse 8). In what was apparently a customary way to take an oath in that day, Eliezer “put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning that matter” (verse 9; cf. verse 2 and 47:29).<sup>296</sup>

## **24:10-27**

Eliezer and his entourage (see 24:32, 54, and 59) made the 450-mile (Davis, p. 228), month-long or more (Hamilton, 2:145) journey from Canaan to the region of Mesopotamia, specifically to the city in which Nahor lived (verse 10), presumably Haran.<sup>297</sup> Eliezer shrewdly went to a strategic location, one that would be frequented by

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<sup>294</sup> According to verse 2 (“that ruled over all that he had”), Eliezer was Abraham’s steward. Because Eliezer had proved himself faithful in this capacity, Abraham could entrust him with this critical task. See Luke 16:10a in this regard.

<sup>295</sup> Hamilton (2:137) translates Abraham’s words in verse 6: “Take my son back there? Absolutely not!”

<sup>296</sup> Davis (p. 228) comments on the possible significance: “The thigh, or ‘loins,’ were regarded as the source of posterity (cf. Gen. 35:11; 46:26; Exod. 1:5). The agreement, then, extended beyond Abraham to his posterity.”

<sup>297</sup> One must surmise that Nahor, who evidently did not accompany the rest of the family from Ur to Haran in 11:31, had since relocated from Ur to Haran.

girls of marriageable age, the town well (verse 11<sup>298</sup>; cf. Exodus 2:16<sup>299</sup> and 1 Samuel 9:11). Eliezer's praying (verses 12-14) and praising (verses 26-27) serve as bookends to what is about to unfold. Eliezer bases his petition upon God's "kindness" (the Hebrew word means "loyal love"), a key concept throughout this chapter (verse 12; cf. the same Hebrew word used in verses 14, 27, and 49); God will lovingly and loyally keep His promise (specifically, the fertility promise) by providentially providing a wife for Isaac. Eliezer's primary concern was to find a woman inwardly beautiful; accordingly, he asked God to make His will known through a simple test of character<sup>300</sup>: the woman who would be kind enough to give not only Eliezer, but also his camels, a drink would be the one for Isaac (verse 14).<sup>301</sup>

Before Eliezer could finish praying, Rebekah appeared at the well (verse 15; cf. Isaiah 65:24). Unknown to Eliezer at the time, Rebekah was the great niece of Abraham (verse 15), just the kind of woman Abraham was looking for (see 24:4, 38, and 40). Contrary to what is sometimes thought, inner beauty and outer beauty are not incompatible; Rebekah would prove to be godly, even though she was evidently gorgeous (verse 16's "very fair"; cf. 12:11). Furthermore, she was a "virgin" (verse 16), most likely meaning, in this context, that she was a woman of marriageable age. She was also a virgin in the sense we normally think ("neither had any man known her," verse 16), further confirmation of her commendable character.

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<sup>298</sup> An interesting tidbit from verse 11 is the fact that Eliezer made the camels "kneel down." Why would Moses report such a seemingly insignificant detail? Ross (p. 419) believes Moses is making a wordplay: "The text says that he made his camels kneel down (*wayyabrek*, in v. 11), a detail that would not otherwise be necessary in the story. But this verb is a homonym [a homonym is a word that sounds like another word] of *berak*, "to bless," which introduced the first section (v. 1). The word intimates that the arrival at the proper place was all a part of the divine blessing."

<sup>299</sup> Not only does Exodus 2:15-21 bear many similarities to this passage, but so does Genesis 29:1-14. Hamilton (2:148) states in this regard: "This is the first of three narratives in the Pentateuch where woman meets man at the well, and a marriage is eventually consummated. The other two are Gen. 29:1-14 and Exod. 2:15-21. The parallels in all three are that a man visits a land other than the one in which he is living. By a well he meets a girl who comes out to draw water. She runs home to tell, and shortly a marriage occurs."

<sup>300</sup> "It should be noted that the servant does not ask for a miraculous divine intervention or for a revelation that would designate Isaac's bride-to-be. He prays, rather, that the rational criteria of suitability that he himself determines might be in accordance with God's will and be effective" (Nahum Sarna, quoted in Hughes, pp. 317-318).

<sup>301</sup> "The details of his test were not arbitrarily chosen; they would indicate a kind and industrious nature in the woman" (Ross, p. 419); "... [F]or she who shall be thus humane to an unknown guest, will, by that very act, give proof of an excellent disposition" (Calvin, 2:18).

When Eliezer saw Rebekah, he ran<sup>302</sup> to meet her and made his request (verse 17). In answer to Eliezer's prayer, Rebekah offered both him (verse 18) and his camels (verses 19-20) a drink. After Rebekah completed this tiring task<sup>303</sup>, Eliezer gave her some jewelry (verse 22), most likely bridal gifts. Eliezer asked Rebekah about her family (verse 23a) and requested permission to stay with them (verse 23b). In answering the first question, Rebekah told Eliezer what the reader was already told (verse 24; cf. verse 15). Rebekah granted Eliezer's request for lodging (verse 25). In response to all that had transpired, Eliezer could not help but give God the glory, thanking Him for His providential guidance (verses 26-27).<sup>304</sup>

### **24:28-49**

In this section, Eliezer is invited into Rebekah's home (verses 29-32). Once there, he relates in great detail all that had transpired since the start of the chapter (verses 33-48). After 65 years (see comments on 24:1), Rebekah's family was undoubtedly glad to hear of Abraham's whereabouts and wellbeing. Of note in this section are Eliezer's words in verse 35 ("The LORD hath ..."), identifying God as the source of Abraham's wealth (cf. Deuteronomy 8:18, 1 Kings 3:13//2 Chronicles 1:12, 1 Chronicles 29:12, Ecclesiastes 5:19, 6:2, and Hosea 2:8); there is no such thing as someone who is independently wealthy or a self-made millionaire. On the meaning of "before whom I walk" in verse 40, see comments on 17:1. In verse 49, Eliezer presses Rebekah's family for a decision, asking them to show him the kindness ("kindly"; cf. comments on 24:12) God had shown him (verse 27).

### **24:50-61**

Rachel's father and brother recognized that Isaac & Rebekah were "a match made in heaven" (Mathews, 2:339) and, therefore, gave their permission for Rebekah to marry Isaac (verses 50-51), though they would never meet their future son-in-law/brother-in-law. In response, Eliezer once again (cf. 24:26) worshipped God (verse 52). Eliezer

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<sup>302</sup> The pace of the narrative picks up at this point. Eliezer runs to Rebekah (v. 17). Rebekah quickly lowers her jar (v. 18), quickly empties her jar (v. 20), runs back to the well (v. 20), and runs back home (v. 28). Laban runs to meet Eliezer (v. 29). Eliezer, Rebekah, and Laban are like Abraham in this way (see 18:2, 6, and 7).

<sup>303</sup> "... [T]he ancient well was a large, deep hole in the earth with steps leading down to the spring water—so that each drawing of water required substantial effort. And more, a camel typically would drink about twenty-five gallons of water, and an ancient water jar held about three gallons of water. This means that Rebekah made between eighty to one hundred descents into the well. As to the amount of time she gave to this, a camel takes about ten minutes to drink its full complement of water. Rebekah's labors filled one and one half to two sweaty hours" (Hughes, p. 318)!

<sup>304</sup> Commenting on these verses, Sailhamer (p. 177) states: "The writer is not content with leaving the reader alone with such an amazing picture of God's work. Rather, in the character of the servant and in his response, the reader is shown the proper response to such events."

then gave some more (cf. 24:22) bridal gifts to Rebekah (verse 53a) and a dowry to Laban and Rebekah's mother (verse 53b).

While Eliezer was eager to complete his mission (verses 54 and 56), Rebekah's family was, understandably, reluctant to cut the apron strings (verse 55). Rebekah's willingness to leave immediately resolved the impasse (verses 57-58).<sup>305</sup> Like her great uncle and soon-to-be father-in-law, Abraham (see 12:1-4), Rebekah was willing to leave her country, relatives, and father's house, a fact that caused G. Wenham (cited in Mathews, 2:322) to call Rebekah the "female Abraham." On the camel caravan back to Canaan, Rebekah was accompanied by her nurse (verse 59), Deborah (35:8), and her maids (verse 61). In words reminiscent of 22:17, Rebekah's family pronounced a blessing upon her as she departed (verse 60; cf. Ruth 4:11-12).

### **24:62-67**

In a case of "boy meets girl," Isaac and Rebekah meet for the first time. While in the field one evening, Isaac noticed the camel caravan in the distance (verse 63). Before meeting Isaac, Rebekah "took a veil, and covered herself" (verse 65<sup>306</sup>); here comes the bride.<sup>307</sup> The longest chapter in Genesis (67 verses) comes to a close with the marriage of Isaac & Rebekah (verse 67). The first statement of verse 67 ("And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent") seems to imply that Rebekah replaced Sarah as the new mother/matriarch of Israel. It is interesting to note that, according to verse 67, Isaac & Rebekah apparently came to love one another after they got married ("and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her"). According to 25:20, Isaac was 40 years old on his wedding day. The marriage of Isaac & Rebekah took place 3 years after the death of Sarah.<sup>308</sup>

### **25:1-11**

25:1-4 gives one branch of Abraham's family tree, through his "wife," Keturah. One perplexing question surrounding Abraham's relationship to Keturah is: Was she his wife

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<sup>305</sup> Commenting on these verses, Davis (p. 230) states: "The ultimate decision to go to Palestine and marry Isaac was Rebekah's (vv. 57, 58). This was no arbitrarily contracted marriage, arranged without due regard for the emotions and wishes of the couple."

<sup>306</sup> It is interesting to note in verse 65 how Eliezer calls Isaac "my master." Previously (in verses 9, 10, 12, 14, 27, 35, 37, 39, 42, 44, 48, 49, 54, and 56), Eliezer referred to Abraham as his master. Could this be an indication that control of the household was being transferred from Abraham to Isaac?

<sup>307</sup> Calvin (2:29), commenting on this verse, states in regards to bridal attire in his day: "So much the more shameful, and the less capable of excuse, is the licentiousness of our own age, in which the apparel of brides seems to be purposely contrived for the subversion of all modesty." Calvin wrote these words in 1563.

<sup>308</sup> Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born (17:17); Sarah died at the age of 127 (23:1), thus making Isaac 37 at her death. Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah (25:20).

(so here) or his concubine (so 1 Chronicles 1:32)?<sup>309</sup> The context seems to favor the second (see verse 6, where “concubines” is most likely a reference to Hagar and Keturah; cf. footnote 195). Keturah bore Abraham six sons (verse 2), giving him eight children in all. In keeping with Isaac being the son of promise, he received the inheritance (verse 5; cf. 24:36). Like Ishmael before them (see 21:14), Abraham’s sons by Keturah were sent away (verse 6<sup>310</sup>).

25:7 picks up where 11:32 left off. While it appears that Abraham dies prior to the birth of his grandsons, Jacob & Esau (Abraham’s death is recorded early on in chapter 25, while the births of Jacob & Esau are recorded later on in chapter 25), he actually lived until Jacob & Esau were 15 years old.<sup>311</sup> Verse 8 gives Abraham’s “obituary” (Hamilton, 2:167). According to the first half of verse 8, Abraham lived a prolonged (quantity) and pleasant (quality) life (cf. Genesis 35:29, 1 Chronicles 29:28, 2 Chronicles 24:15, and Job 42:17), just as God had promised (15:15), physically and mentally<sup>312</sup> strong (Davis, p. 231). According to verse 8b, Abraham was “gathered to his people” (cf. Genesis 25:17, 35:29, 49:29, 33, Numbers 20:24, 26, 27:13, 31:2, and Deuteronomy 32:50), signifying “the reunion of the deceased with his forefathers” (Hamilton, 2:168). Abraham, like Sarah before him (23:19), was buried in the cave of Machpelah (verses 9-10). Just as God “had blessed Abraham in all things” (24:1), so He “blessed his son Isaac” (25:11), signifying the transference of the promises and all its perks from father to son (cf. 17:19, 21, and 21:12).

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<sup>309</sup> The same occurs with Bilhah, who is called both Jacob’s wife (Genesis 30:4) and concubine (Genesis 35:22).

<sup>310</sup> For the significance of “eastward” and “east country” in this verse, see footnote 141.

<sup>311</sup> Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born (21:5); Jacob & Esau were born when Isaac was 60 (25:26), thus making Abraham 160 at their birth; Abraham lived to be 175 (25:7), thus making Jacob & Esau 15 at Abraham’s death.

<sup>312</sup> “... [T]he chief part of a good old age consists in a good conscience and in a serene and tranquil mind” (Calvin, 2:37).

## Lesson 14: Genesis 25:12-26:35

The life of Abraham having come to an end, the focus of Genesis now turns, although briefly, to Abraham's chosen son, Isaac. Before giving the genealogy of Isaac (25:19-35:29), however, Moses first gives the genealogy of Abraham's non-chosen son, Ishmael (25:12-18).<sup>313</sup> The reader of Genesis cannot help but notice that the genealogy of Isaac focuses much more on Isaac's son, Jacob, than it does on Isaac<sup>314</sup> (just as the Terah genealogy, 11:27-25:11 focuses much more on Terah's son, Abram/Abraham than it does on Terah; likewise, the Jacob genealogy, 37:2-50:26, focuses much more on Jacob's son, Joseph, than it does on Jacob); therefore, one might refer to it as the "Jacob narrative." The Jacob narrative begins with the story of the conception and births of Esau & Jacob (25:19-26). Chapter 25 concludes with the story of Esau selling his birthright to Jacob (verses 27-34). Chapter 26 (the only chapter in Genesis given over completely to Isaac) opens with Isaac going down to Gerar (verse 1). God appears to Isaac in Gerar, reaffirming the Abrahamic covenant (verses 2-5). While Isaac is in Gerar, history repeats itself as Isaac lies about the identity of his wife (verses 7-11; cf. 12:10-20 and chapter 20). God greatly prospers Isaac in Gerar, causing tensions between Isaac and the Gerarites (verses 12-22). Isaac moves to Beersheba, and God appears to him again to reaffirm the Abrahamic covenant (verses 23-25; cf. verses 2-5). Once again, history repeats itself as Abimelech and Isaac make a peace treaty (verses 26-31; cf. 21:22-32). Chapter 26 concludes with the report that Esau married two Hittite women and that these marriages grieved his parents (verses 34-35).

### **25:12-18**

25:12 begins the seventh (and the shortest: 7 verses) of the eleven "these are the generations of ..." sections in the book of Genesis (see under "Structure" in Lesson 1). In this section, Moses gives the genealogy of Ishmael. Ishmael fathered twelve sons (verses 13-15), providing the foundation for the fulfillment of the promise made to Hagar in 16:10 ("I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for

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<sup>313</sup> Notice that the Ishmael genealogy is only 7 verses long (25:12-18), while Isaac's is over 10 chapters long (25:19-35:29); for the significance, see footnote 97. Notice also that Ishmael's genealogy reads like a genealogy, while Isaac's genealogy reads more like a running narrative or story; for the significance, see footnote 14.

<sup>314</sup> Of the four patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph), Isaac is by far the most obscure. Although Isaac lived the longest of the four (Abraham lived to be 175, 25:7; Isaac lived to be 180, 35:28; Jacob lived to be 147, 47:28; Joseph lived to be 110, 50:26), the least is said about him. Charles Erdman (quoted in Davis, p. 227) gives the following explanation: "The figure of even a great man may be dwarfed by comparison with that of a distinguished father or of a famous son. Thus the character of Isaac is overshadowed by the majesty of Abraham and the dramatic interest of Jacob. There was a third factor which diminished the importance of Isaac; he was the husband of a clever and masterful wife. No matter how exciting the scene in which he may appear, he is always assigned to a minor part. At least, by contrast with these other actors, his role in life was prosaic, uneventful, obscure."



multitude”), to Abraham in regards to Ishmael in 17:20 (“I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly ... and I will make him a great nation”), and to Hagar in regards to Ishmael in 21:18 (“I will make him a great nation”). In verse 16, Ishmael’s sons are called “princes,” a fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham in 17:6 (“kings shall come out of thee”) and to Abraham in regards to Ishmael in 17:20 (“twelve princes shall he beget”).

## **25:19-26**

25:19 begins the eighth of the eleven “these are the generations of ...” sections in the book of Genesis (see under “Structure” in Lesson 1), a section that continues through 35:29. In this section, Moses gives the genealogy of Isaac. As with the genealogy of Terah before it (11:27-25:11) and the genealogy of Jacob after it (37:2-50:26), the Isaac genealogy reads more like a running narrative than it does a genealogy (cf. footnote 313). As mentioned previously, since Jacob is the primary focus of the Isaac genealogy, one can call 25:19-35:29 the “Jacob narrative.”

The first story contained in the Jacob narrative is the account of the conception and births of Esau & Jacob (verses 19-26). Like Sarai before her (11:30), Rebekah was “barren” (verse 21).<sup>315</sup> Rather than making the same mistake his parents made in trying to solve Sarai’s infertility problem (chapter 16), Isaac took the problem to the Lord in prayer (verse 21a; cf. footnote 193). God answered, enabling Rebekah to conceive (verse 21b).

Rebekah had a rough pregnancy (verse 22)<sup>316</sup>, concerning which she “went to enquire of the LORD” (verse 22; how she did, we are not told). God told Rebekah (again, we are not told how) the reason for the war in her womb (verse 23a): “Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels.” Hamilton (2:174) translates the second statement, “two peoples are drawing themselves apart while yet in your bosom.” God went on to tell Rebekah something equally surprising (verse 23b): “And the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.”<sup>317</sup> A younger son having preeminence over an older son “was

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<sup>315</sup> Like Abram/Abraham & Sarai/Sarah before them, who waited for 25 years, Isaac & Rebekah had to wait on the Lord, being married for 20 years before they had Esau & Jacob (compare 25:20 with 25:26). One can only imagine what was going through their minds: Would God’s fertility promise fail? Isaac & Rebekah passed this test of faith, waiting on and seeking the Lord, rather than taking matters into their own hands, as Abram & Sarai had done (chapter 16).

<sup>316</sup> The Hebrew verb translated “struggled” in verse 22 is a strong one. According to Hamilton (2:176), it means “to abuse, crush.” According to Mathews (2:386-387), it means “a violent collision, a crushing or breaking (e.g., Judg 9:53; Isa 36:6). The ... verb indicates reciprocal blows occurred between the children.” It is translated “oppressed” in 1 Samuel 12:3-4 and Hosea 5:11, “crush” in Amos 4:1. Commenting on its use in Genesis 25:22, Ross (p. 439) states: “Since it normally signifies crushing or oppressing this was apparently not a mild discomfort.”

<sup>317</sup> It was nearly 1,000 years before this prophecy was fulfilled (2 Samuel 8:14).

contrary to ancient Near Eastern custom, but the elective purposes of God transcend culture” (Davis, p. 232; cf. Romans 9:10-13).<sup>318</sup>

The firstborn twin was named in accordance with his appearance (verse 25), the second in accordance with his activity (verse 26). The firstborn, Esau “came out red” (verse 25; cf. the description of David in 1 Samuel 16:12 and 17:42 as “ruddy”). The Hebrew word translated “red” is *admoni*. Accordingly, Esau is also known in Scripture as “Edom” (Genesis 36:1 and 8), the father of the Edomites. Esau’s appearance was also “all over like an hairy garment” (verse 25; cf. 27:11 and 23). “Esau’s appearance—more like an animal of the field than an ordinary baby—prompted his naming” (Ross, p. 440). The name Esau (Hebrew: *esaw*) likely comes from the similar-sounding Hebrew word translated “hairy” in this verse (*se’ar*).<sup>319</sup> The second twin, Jacob literally followed on the heels of his brother (verse 26), prompting his parents to give him the name Jacob. Jacob in Hebrew is *ya’aqob*; the Hebrew word for “heel” is *’aqeb*. Jacob lived up (or should we say “down”?) to his name. “In time the name came to suggest ‘take by the heel, trip up, defraud’” (Ross, p. 440; cf. Esau’s words in 27:36).

### **25:27-34**

The Jacob narrative fast-forwards to the time when Esau and Jacob are grown men (verse 27). Esau and Jacob were as different in disposition (verse 27) as they were in destiny (verse 23). Esau was an outdoorsman, while Jacob was more of a homebody (verse 27). The Hebrew word used to describe Jacob in verse 27, translated “plain” by the KJV, has been variously understood.<sup>320</sup>

Because Esau was the firstborn, he was in line to receive the “birthright,” which consisted of, among other things, a double portion of the inheritance (see Deuteronomy 21:17). The birthright could be lost by committing a grave offense (Davis, p. 232); this happened to Reuben (see Genesis 49:3-4 and 1 Chronicles 5:1) due to his sin (see Genesis 35:22). The birthright could also be sold or traded (Davis, p. 233), as it was here at the end of Genesis 25. Perhaps in conjunction with a predetermined plan<sup>321</sup>,

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<sup>318</sup> Other instances in Genesis where, contrary to custom, God favored a younger son over an older one include Abel over Cain, Seth over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Joseph over his ten older brothers, and Judah over his three older brothers. Sailhamer (p. 183) captures the significance: “The intention behind each of these ‘reversals’ was the recurring theme of God’s sovereign plan of grace. The blessing was not a natural right, as a right of the firstborn son would be. Rather, God’s blessing is extended to those who have no other claim to it. They all received what they did not deserve.”

<sup>319</sup> This same Hebrew word is likely behind the naming of a future residence of Esau, Seir (see Genesis 32:3 and 36:8).

<sup>320</sup> The NASB translates it “peaceful.” Ross (p. 448) “even-tempered.” Hamilton (2:179) “wholesome.” Calvin (2:49) “simple.” The NIV “quiet.” The NKJV “mild.”

Jacob “sod pottage” (verse 29), or “cooked stew” (NASB), which a “faint” (verses 29 and 30) Esau desperately (verse 32) desired. Esau refers to Jacob’s stew as “red pottage,” another (cf. verse 25 and comments on) reason he is also known in Scripture as “Edom” (verse 30; “red pottage” is the Hebrew word *adom*). In response to Esau’s request for some of Jacob’s stew, Jacob made Esau an offer Esau wouldn’t refuse: “Sell me this day thy birthright” (verse 31). Because Esau “despised his birthright” (verse 34; cf. verse 32 and Hebrews 12:16), he sold it to Jacob (verse 33) for a mere meal (verse 34).<sup>322</sup> As Hamilton (2:186) states: “Esau capitulates and Jacob capitalizes.” Ross (p. 449) adds: “In this section the narrator effectively depicts ... the superior hunting ability of Jacob. The cunning hunter fell into a better hunter’s trap.”

## **26:1-6**

Sailhamer (p. 185) gives an excellent synopsis of the significance of this twenty-sixth chapter: “There are several similarities between the events of this chapter and those in the life of Abraham (12:10-20; 20:1-18). The writer [Moses] is not only fully conscious of the similarities, but he also appears to be using them to advance the theme of God’s faithfulness to his promises. While the stories and narratives of this chapter appear at first glance to be only loosely related, without a clear guiding theme, when seen from the perspective of the life of Abraham, the chapter shows a remarkable unity of structure and purpose. Each of the brief narratives that make up chapter 26 portrays Isaac in a situation or circumstance that has a parallel in the life of Abraham. In the short span of one chapter, the writer shows how the whole life of Isaac was a rehearsal of that which happened to Abraham. Thus the lesson that is conveyed is that God’s faithfulness in the past can be counted on in the present and the future. What he has done for the fathers, he will also do for the sons.”

Chapter 26 opens with “a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham” (verse 1a). Thus, at the end of chapter 25 we have a famished man (Esau), while at the start of chapter 26, we have a famished land. Due to the famine, Isaac, like Abraham before him in chapter 12, headed for greener pastures. Unlike Abraham, who went to Egypt in chapter 12, Isaac went to Gerar (as Abraham did in chapter 20). The reason Isaac went to Gerar instead of to Egypt (where he was apparently headed) was because “the LORD appeared unto him [cf. His appearing to Abraham in 12:7, 17:1, and 18:1], and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of” (verse 2). The “land which I shall tell thee of” is reminiscent of God’s words to Abraham in 12:1 (“a land that I will shew thee”).<sup>323</sup> God wanted Isaac to

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<sup>321</sup> So Ross (p. 452): “Jacob knew that Esau was profane and often came in famished, and so he planned to take advantage of his brother ....”

<sup>322</sup> Ross (p. 447) points out the similarity between this story and the story of the Fall in chapter 3: “At the heart of each narrative is the dialogue that invites the naïve to surrender the spiritual blessing for the satisfaction of the natural desires.”

stay within the confines of the Promised Land (“Sojourn in this land ... for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries,” verse 3)

The promises God makes to Isaac in verses 3 and 4 are the same ones He had made to Abraham, thus showing that the Abrahamic covenant was still in effect, though Abraham was deceased (“I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father,” verse 3; cf. 22:16-18). In verse 3 (“unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries”) and again in verse 4 (“and will give unto thy seed all these countries”), God reiterates the land promise to Isaac (cf. 12:7, 13:15, and 15:18). At the start of verse 4, He reiterates the fertility promise (“I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven”; cf. 15:5 and 22:17). At the end of verse 4, He reiterates the promise to bless all nations through Isaac’s descendants (“in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”; cf. 12:3 and comments on, 18:18, and 22:18).

In verse 5, God gives Isaac an incentive to obey His command to “dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of” (verse 2) “sojourn in this land” (verse 3). Just as Abraham obeyed (verse 5; cf. 12:4 and 22:18) and was, consequently, blessed (24:1 and 35), as God promised he would be if (12:2)/since (22:17) he obeyed, so Isaac would be blessed (26:3) if he obeyed.<sup>324</sup> Isaac obeyed (verse 6) and was blessed (see 26:12 and 29).<sup>325</sup>

## **26:7-11**

Just as history repeated itself in chapter 20, so it “three-peated” itself here in chapter 26. Just as Abraham twice (at least—see 20:13) lied about the true identity of his wife (in chapters 12 and 20), so did his son, Isaac. Once again, the wife’s beauty<sup>326</sup> (so in

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<sup>323</sup> Ross (p. 458) gives the possible significance: “... [T]here is an allusion to the initial call of Abraham in the words ‘in the land which I shall tell you ....’ Such an allusion would encourage Isaac’s faith in following the Lord’s instructions.”

<sup>324</sup> God “commends the obedience of Abraham, in order that Isaac may be stimulated to an imitation of his example” (Calvin, 2:60).

<sup>325</sup> Neither this passage, nor the Genesis 22 passage, should be interpreted to imply that the Abrahamic covenant was conditioned upon patriarchal obedience. According to Ross (p. 458), “... [T]he fulfillment was guaranteed because the Lord swore to do it. Any contingency-based obedience would refer to participation in the promises, not the fulfillment itself.” In like manner, Hamilton (2:194) cites Walter Kaiser to the effect that where conditionality is present in the divine promises, it is attached to the participants, not to the promise itself. In other words, the promises contained in the Abrahamic covenant would be fulfilled regardless. Whether or not the patriarchs and their descendants enjoyed the blessings that went along with the covenant depended upon their fulfillment of its obligations (circumcision, etc.). See also footnote 229 in this regard.

<sup>326</sup> Just as Sarah was beautiful in spite of advanced age (65 years old in chapter 12; 90 years old in chapter 20), so was Rebekah. Though we don’t know Rebekah’s precise age in chapter 26, we

chapter 12; perhaps so in chapter 20) leads the husband to fear that the locals will kill him (verse 7; cf. 12:12-13 and 20:11). While Abraham's lie that Sarah was his sister had some truth to it, Isaac's lie that Rebekah was his sister was totally devoid of the truth (Rebekah was related to Isaac, but not as his sister). In verse 8, Isaac's deception is discovered, as Abimelech<sup>327</sup> sees Isaac "sporting" with Rebekah. As in chapters 12 and 20, a pagan potentate acts more pious than the patriarch, as Abimelech takes Isaac to task (verses 9-10). Abimelech's exclamatory-like question in verse 10 ("What is this thou hast done unto us?") is reminiscent of Pharaoh's in 12:18 ("What is this that thou hast done unto me?") and of the earlier Abimelech's in 20:9 ("What hast thou done unto us"?). The rendering, "guiltiness" in verse 10 is too tame; Hamilton (2:197) translates it "retribution"; thus, once again (see comments on the chapter 20 incident) we see God's attitude towards adultery. God in His providence uses even pagan potentates to accomplish His purposes (cf. Isaiah 44:28). In verse 11, He protects Isaac & Rebekah by an edict from Abimelech, which stated that anyone who touched either Isaac or Rebekah<sup>328</sup> would be executed.

### **26:12-17**

As promised (see 26:3), God bountifully blessed Isaac (verses 12-13). Such bounty, however, occasioned envy among the locals (verse 14). In their spite, the Philistines vandalized Abraham's wells (verse 15), no doubt hoping to prevent Isaac from using them to water his land (verse 12) and his livestock (verse 14). No doubt due to his "great store of servants" (verse 14), Isaac became a security threat to the Philistines, prompting Abimelech to ask Isaac to leave Gerar (verse 16; cf. Exodus 1:7-10), which Isaac did, moving to the valley of Gerar (verse 17).

### **26:18-25**

When Isaac left Gerar, the blessing of the Lord followed him. It seemed as though everywhere he and his servants dug, they found water.<sup>329</sup> Once again (cf. verses 12-17), Isaac's prosperity produced Philistine opposition. The herdsmen of Gerar

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do know that she gave birth to Esau and Jacob 20 years after getting married (compare 25:20 with 25:26) and that Esau and Jacob had grown to adulthood by this time (25:27).

<sup>327</sup> This may or may not be the same Abimelech as the one in chapter 20. Because Abimelech was apparently a dynastic title (see footnote 249), most think this was a different Abimelech, chapter 26 taking place at least 75 years (Ross, p. 468) after chapter 20; Davis (p. 234) says 97 years.

<sup>328</sup> "The verb 'touch' here is a double entendre. To touch Isaac means to abuse him physically, to injure him [cf. the same verb in 12:17, translated "plagued"]. To touch Rebekah means to abuse her sexually [cf. the same verb in 20:6]" (Hamilton, 2:197).

<sup>329</sup> "The point of the narrative is that, no matter where Isaac was forced to dig, and no matter how often the Philistines stopped up his wells, he found water in the wilderness—because God was with him" (Ross, p. 463).

quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen (cf. 13:7) over two wells Isaac's servants had dug, prompting Isaac to name them accordingly (verses 19-21).<sup>330</sup>

Isaac ended his sojourn in the Gerar area by moving northward to Beersheba (verse 23). Almost as soon as Isaac arrived in Beersheba ("the same night"), the LORD appeared to him (cf. 26:2), exhorting him not to fear (cf. God's words to Abraham in 15:1), due to His presence (verse 24a; cf. Joshua 1:9, Psalm 23:4, and Hebrews 13:5-6), and promising to bless him (verse 24b; cf. 26:3) and multiply his descendants (verse 24b; cf. 26:4). Like his father, Abraham, Isaac worshipped the Lord by building an altar (cf. 12:7, 8, and 13:18) and calling on His name (verse 25; cf. 12:8, 13:4, and 21:33; as well as comments on 4:26 and footnote 154).

### **26:26-35**

The story of this section is reminiscent of the one in 21:27-34. In chapter 21, Abimelech, accompanied by the commander of his army, Philcol, sought Abraham out and made a peace treaty with him. Here in chapter 26, a different Abimelech, accompanied by (the same or a different<sup>331</sup>?) Philcol and an adviser named Ahuzzath, seek Isaac out and make a peace treaty with him. The treaty made with Isaac here in chapter 26 is more or less a reaffirmation of the treaty made with Abraham back in chapter 21.

The gang from Gerar (verse 26) readily confessed that God was with Isaac (verse 28; cf. 26:3 and 24, as well as the earlier Abimelech's words to Abraham in 21:22) and that God's blessing was upon him (verse 29; cf. 26:12).

Once again, Isaac's prosperity is seen, as his servants find water (verse 32) in the well they dug back in verse 25. Isaac names the well "Shebah" (verse 33), meaning "oath," no doubt in commemoration of the oaths he and Abimelech made that day (verse 31). Thus, Beersheba ("well of the oath") lived up to its name (verse 33; cf. 21:31).

Chapter 26 ends with the report that Esau married two Hittite women (verse 34), a source of grief to his parents (verse 35; cf. 27:46). Esau's less-than-commendable character comes to the fore once again (cf. 25:27-34), as he commits polygamy, weds without parental consent, and marries Canaanite women (see 24:3 and comments on and 28:1). According to Calvin (2:77), these last two verses of chapter 26 serve as "a kind of prelude of [Esau's] rejection" in chapter 27; Esau's unworthiness to be the heir is once again made clear to all.

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<sup>330</sup> The name given to the second was "Sitnah" (verse 21), from the Hebrew verb *satan*, meaning "to oppose." The English word Satan ("opponent, adversary") is derived from this Hebrew root, *stn*.

<sup>331</sup> Davis (p. 235) appears to be of the opinion that it is a different Philcol, stating that Philcol may have been an official title or a recurring family name.

## Lesson 15: Genesis 27-28

In Genesis 27-28, the Jacob narrative (25:19-35:29) continues. In chapter 27, Jacob (with his mother, Rebekah as his accomplice) impersonates Esau, thereby deceiving his father, Isaac into giving him the blessing<sup>332</sup> intended for Esau (verses 1-40). Jacob's treachery leads Esau to plot Jacob's murder (verse 41). Rebekah alerts Jacob to this threat and instructs him to flee to her family in Padan-aram (verses 42-45). At the end of chapter 27 and the start of chapter 28, Rebekah gets Isaac's approval to send Jacob to Padan-aram, not only for Jacob's protection, but also to find him a wife (27:46-28:5). After Jacob departs, Esau takes a third wife (28:6-9). Chapter 28 concludes with the account of Jacob's encounter with God through a dream while on his way to Padan-aram (verses 10-22).

### **27:1-4**

When Esau & Jacob were born, God told Rebekah that "the elder shall serve the younger" (25:23). In spite of this divine declaration, Isaac determined to "bless" Esau (verse 4), rather than Jacob (see especially 27:29). "Old<sup>333</sup>" (verses 1 and 2) and believing that his time on earth was coming to an end ("I know not the day of my death," verse 2; "before I die," verse 4), Isaac summoned Esau (verse 1) and asked him to "take me some venison" (verse 3) and "make me savoury meat" (verse 4). After eating, Isaac would then bless Esau (verse 4).<sup>334</sup>

### **27:5-17**

Like Sarah in 18:10, Rebekah overheard the conversation between Isaac and Esau (verse 5), informed Jacob about it (verses 6-7<sup>335</sup>), then devised a plan whereby Jacob

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<sup>332</sup> The blessing was a last will and testament of sorts, the legal mechanism whereby the birthright became official (Nahum Sarna, cited in Davis, p. 233). "Pronouncing the blessing was considered to be the act formally acknowledging the firstborn as the principal heir" (Hamilton, 2:185). Thus, it appears that Isaac & Esau not only ignored God's choice of Jacob over Esau (25:23), but also the transaction that took place at the end of chapter 25 (the trading of the birthright to Jacob).

<sup>333</sup> How old was Isaac at this time? We know that he was at least 100 years old, as he was 60 when Esau & Jacob were born (25:26), and Esau was at least 40 at the time (26:34). We also know that he was no older than 160 years old (he died at 180, 35:28; Esau & Jacob buried him, 35:29; all of this was after Jacob had been away in Padan-aram for 20 years, 31:38).

<sup>334</sup> According to 25:28, Isaac favored Esau "because he did eat of his venison." It appears that Isaac in chapter 27, like Esau in chapter 25 (verses 27-34), foolishly allowed his physical appetite to rule him. Just as Esau traded his birthright for a mere meal, so Isaac sought to bless the wrong son simply because that son could prepare a meal pleasing to his taste (see verse 4's "make me savoury meat, such as I love").

could deceive his father into giving him the blessing instead (verses 8-10). While Jacob rightly objected to the plan, he did so for the wrong reason. Because Isaac's eyesight was so poor ("his eyes were dim, so that he could not see," verse 1), Jacob feared that he would "feel him out." Since Esau was "a hairy man" (verse 11; cf. 25:25) and he "a smooth man" (verse 11), Jacob knew he would fail any such touch test (verse 12). At Rebekah's insistence (verse 13), however, the two proceeded with the plan. Besides duplicating Esau's dish (verse 14), they had Jacob impersonate Esau by having Jacob wear some of Esau's clothes (verse 15) and by making Jacob feel hairy through the use of goatskins (verse 16).

Though God in His providence used the actions of Rebekah and Jacob to accomplish His desired end, their actions are yet another instance in the book of Genesis of man utilizing the wrong means to accomplish a good end (cf. footnote 193). Rather than resorting to such a ruse, Rebekah and Jacob should have respectfully reminded Isaac that Jacob, not Esau, was God's choice and, thus, the one to receive the blessing. If Isaac proceeded to bless Esau anyway, Rebekah and Jacob would simply have had to trust God to fulfill the promise of 25:23 another way.<sup>336</sup> While Rebekah and Jacob achieved their objective, they also suffered the natural consequences that came with the improper way they did so.<sup>337</sup> Two important lessons can be learned from this episode: 1) God's work is to be done God's way; God-ordained ends are to be

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<sup>335</sup> In verse 7, Rebekah informs not only Jacob, but also the reader of Isaac's words, "before the LORD" (verse 4 does not record them), further showing the official nature of the proceedings, "before the LORD" being "a phrase with a technical legal connotation in treaty contexts" (Hamilton, 2:215).

<sup>336</sup> "What would have happened if Rebekah had not heard, or if she had done nothing? We may only speculate; but since the oracle of God had reserved the birthright for Jacob, any attempted blessing would have come to naught. Perhaps, as with Balaam [in Num 23-24], the Lord would have overruled the effort by some unusual means" (Ross, p. 477). Calvin (2:88) similarly states: "The paternal benediction was a seal of God's grace, I confess it; but she [Rebekah] ought rather to have waited till God should bring relief from heaven, by changing the mind and guiding the tongue of Isaac, than have attempted what was unlawful. For if Balaam, who prostituted his venal [susceptible to bribery] tongue, was constrained by the Spirit, contrary to his own wish, to bless the elect people, whom he would rather have devoted to destruction (Num. xxii. 12,) how much more powerfully would the same spirit have influenced the tongue of holy Isaac ...."

<sup>337</sup> "They gained nothing, and they lost a great deal, by their wicked interference. They gained nothing; for God had promised that the birthright would be Jacob's, and would have given it him in some way redounding to his credit and not to his shame. And they lost a great deal. The mother lost her son; Jacob had to flee for his life, and, for all we know, Rebekah never saw him more. And Jacob lost all the comforts of home, and all those possessions his father had accumulated. He had to flee with nothing but his staff, an outcast to begin the world for himself. From this first false step onwards to his death, he was pursued by misfortune, until his own verdict on his life was, 'Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life'" (Marcus Dods, quoted in Ross, pp. 478-479).



accomplished using God-ordained means and 2) While God in His providence can and does at times use man's sinful choices to accomplish His purposes, this in no way legitimizes such sinful choices.

### **27:18-29**

In response to Isaac's question in verse 18, "Who art thou, my son?," Jacob answers with a blatant lie: "I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me" (verse 19). Jacob answers Isaac's next question, "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?" (verse 20a) with a blasphemous lie: "Because the LORD thy God brought it to me" (verse 20b).

In spite of correctly identifying the voice he heard as being that of Jacob (verse 22), Isaac was fooled by what he felt, the hairy hands of Esau (verses 22-23). As a result, Isaac was on the verge of blessing Jacob (last words of verse 23).<sup>338</sup>

Isaac, still not absolutely convinced, asks Jacob point blank, "Art thou my very son Esau?" (verse 24a). Once again, Jacob answers with a blatant lie: "I am" (verse 24b). After eating the duplicated dish (verse 25), Isaac asks Jacob for a kiss (verse 26). As Jacob drew near to kiss Isaac, Isaac caught the scent of Esau's clothes, convincing him that the boy before him was Esau (verse 27). Consequently, Isaac blessed Jacob (verses 27-29). The final benediction of the blessing, verse 29's "Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee" unmistakably places Jacob within the confines of the Abrahamic covenant (cf. God's words to Abraham in 12:3).

### **27:30-40**

In a classic case of close call, as soon as Jacob exits stage right, Esau enters stage left (verse 30).<sup>339</sup> Once it dawned on Isaac that he had blessed the wrong (in his estimation) son, he was visibly shaken ("trembled very exceedingly," verse 33). Esau also reacted violently ("he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry"<sup>340</sup>, verse 34). Though obtained improperly, the blessing already invoked could not be revoked ("Yea, and he shall be blessed," verse 33).<sup>341</sup> In acting "with subtilty" (verse 35), Jacob lived up to his name (verse 36a<sup>342</sup>; cf. comments on 25:26). Esau's claim in verse 36a that

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<sup>338</sup> The last words of verse 23, translated "so he blessed him" by the KJV, is better translated: "He was on the verge of blessing him" (Hamilton, 2:218); cf. Ross (p. 478): "And he was about to bless him."

<sup>339</sup> "... Esau arrives right on the heels of Jacob (an intriguing reversal from their birth ...)" (Walton, *Genesis*, p. 556).

<sup>340</sup> Hamilton (2:224) translates: "He burst into long and bitter groans."

<sup>341</sup> "The binding character of the blessing is clear because Esau did not argue for a transfer of the blessing to him just because a mistake had been made. He merely asked for some additional blessing" (Howard Vos, cited in Benware, p. 47).

Jacob had taken away his birthright is an exaggerated one. Because Isaac had exhausted all his blessings on Jacob, there were none left for Esau (verses 36b-37). Isaac's words in verse 40, "by thy sword shalt thou live" signified an existence by war and plunder (Hamilton, 2:228). Isaac's final words to Esau, "and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck" (verse 40) came to pass when Edom revolted against Judah during the reign of Jehoram (2 Kings 8:20-22//2 Chronicles 21:8-10).

### **27:41-45**

Not surprisingly, "Esau hated Jacob" (verse 41a). So great was Esau's hatred that he determined to kill Jacob once their father, Isaac died (verse 41b).<sup>343</sup> News of Esau's plans somehow reached Rebekah's ears, and she in turn alerted Jacob to the danger (verse 42). As before (in 27:8-10), Rebekah devised a plan for Jacob, commanding him to go into exile, seeking refuge in Haran with her brother, Laban (verse 43) for "a few days" (verse 44; according to 31:38, the "few days" turned out to be 20 years!) until Esau cooled off (verses 44-45a; while time may heal all wounds, in some cases it takes a very long time). With her words, "that which thou hast done to him" in verse 45a Rebekah seems to be absolving herself. Rebekah not only fears for Jacob's life, but also for Esau's (verse 45b). If Esau were to kill Jacob, Jacob's blood could be avenged by someone within the family taking Esau's life (cf. Cain's concern in 4:14, as well as 2 Samuel 14:6-7).

### **27:46-28:5**

Though Rebekah's primary motivation for sending Jacob to Haran was undoubtedly concern for his personal safety, when she ran the idea by Isaac she gave as her rationale the possibility that Jacob would follow in his brother's footsteps by marrying one of the local girls (27:46). Before sending Jacob off to Padan-aram<sup>344</sup>, Isaac (in words reminiscent of those Abraham gave to Eliezer in 24:3-4) charged him to marry, not a Canaanite woman (28:1), but one of Laban's daughters (verse 2; thus, one of his cousins), and invoked a blessing upon him (28:3-4; cf. 24:60), which once again (cf. 27:29) squarely placed him within the confines of the Abrahamic covenant.

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<sup>342</sup> Esau's words in verse 36, "Is not he rightly named Jacob" could be paraphrased: "He isn't named Jacob for nothing."

<sup>343</sup> This is one of the many fraternal feuds in the book of Genesis. Besides this one between Esau and Jacob, there was one between Cain and Abel (4:3-8), one between Ishmael and Isaac (21:9), and one between Joseph and his brothers (chapter 37). Once again, the fertility promise is at stake. If Esau kills Jacob before Jacob marries and has a son, it's the end of the line for the promised line. As Walton (*Genesis*, p. 557) states: "By the end of chapter 27 the conflict has become so intense that the family may not survive. How will God fulfill the promise that Abraham will become a great nation if his grandsons exterminate one another?"

<sup>344</sup> Padan-aram, which literally means "the plain of Aram" (Davis, p. 243), is located in modern Syria. It was several hundred miles north and east of Canaan and over a month-long journey by foot.

## **28:6-9**

28:6-9 and 26:34-35 serve as “bookends” to 27:1-28:5. In an attempt to redeem himself, Esau married a third wife (worsening his polygamous state in the process), only this time he married within the family by going to Ishmael (verse 9), i.e., the family of Ishmael (Ishmael had already died by this point) and marrying one of Ishmael’s daughters.

## **28:10-22**

On his journey from Beersheba (where the family resided since 26:23) to Haran (verse 10), Jacob came to a certain “place” (verse 11; cf. “place” two more times in verse 11, one time in verse 16, one time in verse 17, and one time in verse 19), wherein he spent the night (verse 11). After falling asleep, Jacob had a dream in which he saw a “ladder” (or stairway) connecting earth and heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it<sup>345</sup> (verse 12; cf. John 1:51). More significantly, the LORD reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant with him (verses 13-14), as He did with Isaac in 26:2-5 and 23-25. In verse 13, God makes the land promise to Jacob (cf. 13:15 and 26:3). In verse 14, He makes the fertility promise to him (cf. 13:16).<sup>346</sup> Also in verse 14, God promises to bless all nations through Jacob and his descendants (cf. 12:3 and comments on, 18:18, 22:18, and 26:4). God also promises Jacob His presence (“I am with thee,” verse 15) and His protection (“and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest,” verse 15); the two go hand in hand (see Joshua 1:9, Psalm 23:4, 46:7, and 11). God also promises Jacob that He would bring him back to the Promised Land<sup>347</sup> (verse 15), which He did in 33:18 (some 20 years or more later, 31:38; another instance [cf. footnote 315] in which one of God’s children had to wait on Him a long time before He fulfilled His promise<sup>348</sup>).

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<sup>345</sup> “The stairway symbolized the genuine and uninterrupted fellowship between God in heaven and His people on earth. The angelic messengers reflect God’s constant care of His own” (Davis, p. 244).

<sup>346</sup> Hamilton (2:242) captures the significance of this promise: “The inclusion of the phrase ‘your offspring/descendants’ in vv. 13, 14 (twice) would be particularly meaningful to an unmarried person in flight from a wounded brother and in flight to Haran to obtain a wife, thence to start his family. Yahweh announces indirectly ahead of time the success of Jacob’s journey to Haran to procure a bride.”

<sup>347</sup> Ross (p. 487) captures the significance of this promise: “If he truly was the heir, why must he flee from the land? Would God’s blessing be his as it had been Abraham’s and Isaac’s before him? Nothing less than a sure word from God would ease his doubts and give him confidence for the future.”

<sup>348</sup> “All that Jacob had to rely on was the word of the Lord, and he patiently waited for twenty years until the divine directive came to return. He found that to trust God’s promises was sufficient, no matter how long the delay” (Mathews, 2:452).

Upon awakening, Jacob realized that God Himself had appeared to him that night (verse 16).<sup>349</sup> To commemorate the occasion, Jacob made a pillar out of his “pillow” (if I spoke with a Southern accent, you might think I was repeating myself ☺) (verse 18; cf. Genesis 35:14 and 1 Samuel 7:12) and poured oil on top of it (verse 18; cf. Genesis 35:14), thereby consecrating it (cf. Leviticus 8:10-12). To further commemorate the occasion, he named the locale “Bethel,” meaning “house of God” (from the Hebrew word for house, *beth* + *El*, the shortened form of the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*) (verse 19). Finally, Jacob made a vow (verses 20-22<sup>350</sup>).

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<sup>349</sup> This is the first of 4 times Jacob has a heavenly encounter. The second is in 32:1-2. The third is in 32:24-32. The fourth is in 35:9-15. The first and fourth encounters bear many striking similarities.

<sup>350</sup> Jacob’s “of all that thou shalt give me” in verse 22 infers that when we give to God, we are giving to Him what He has already given to us (cf. comments on 24:35).

## Lesson 16: Genesis 29-30

In Genesis 29-30, the Jacob narrative (25:19-35:29) continues. In chapter 29, God directs Jacob to a well, at which he meets Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his uncle (verses 1-14). After a month (verse 14), Jacob asks Laban for Rachel's hand in marriage, offering, as a dowry, to serve Laban for seven years (verse 18). Laban agrees (verse 19), and the seven-year engagement period ensues (verse 20). At the end of the seven years, Laban gives Jacob a taste of his own medicine by deceiving him into marrying Leah (verses 23 and 25) and by extorting seven more years of service out of him to maintain the right to marry Rachel (verse 27). Jacob agrees to the additional seven years and marries Rachel one week after marrying Leah (verses 28 and 30).

In the remainder of chapter 29 and into chapter 30, Leah and Rachel have a childbearing contest (Ross, p. 505).<sup>351</sup> Leah took the early lead by bearing Jacob four sons: Reuben (29:32), Simeon (29:33), Levi (29:34), and Judah (29:35), then went on the "DL" (disabled list) (29:35). Because Rachel was also on the "DL" (29:31 and 30:1-2), she had her maid, Bilhah "pinch hit" for her (30:3-4). Consequently, Bilhah bore Jacob two sons: Dan (30:5-6) and Naphtali (30:7-8). Seeing her lead cut in half, Leah, still on the "DL" (30:9), had her maid, Zilpah "pinch hit" for her (30:9) and bear Jacob two sons, thus getting the two runs back: Gad (30:10-11) and Asher (30:12-13). After Rachel and Leah made a trade (30:14-16), Leah came off the "DL" and extended her lead by scoring three more runs, bearing Jacob two more sons and a daughter: Issachar (30:17-18), Zebulun (30:19-20), and Dinah (30:21). Finally, Rachel came off the "DL" and got her first "RBI" (run batted in) by bearing Jacob his eleventh son, Joseph (30:22-24).<sup>352</sup>

After the birth of Joseph, Jacob was ready to head back home to Canaan (30:25-26). Due to Laban's plea (30:27-31a), however, Jacob agreed to stay in Haran and continue shepherding Laban's flocks, provided Laban would give him all the uncommonly-colored goats and sheep (30:31b-34). In spite of the shenanigans of Laban (30:35-36) and Jacob (30:37-42), God, contrary to expectations, caused Jacob to get the best of the deal (30:39 and 42b).

### **29:1-8**

No doubt due to his encounter with God at the end of the previous chapter and the encouragement it gave him (see especially God's words to Jacob in 28:13-15), Jacob continued on his journey to Haran with a spring in his step (verse 1a's "went on his

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<sup>351</sup> Please forgive the use of the baseball analogy to follow.

<sup>352</sup> Rachel would go on to bear Jacob one more son, Benjamin (35:16-18). The twelve sons of Jacob (6 by Leah, 2 by Bilhah, 2 by Zilpah, and 2 by Rachel) laid a firm foundation for the fulfillment of the fertility promise.

journey”<sup>353</sup>). Jacob “came into the land of the people of the east” (verse 1b). As noted previously (see footnotes 96 and 141), the geographical designation “east” is not without significance. It is interesting to note that, though (in relation to Canaan, from where Jacob came) Haran is much more north than it is east, Moses mentions the latter direction, but not the former. Hamilton (2:252) captures the significance: “More than any other book in the OT, Genesis emphasizes the east (see 3:24; 4:16; 10:30; 11:2; 13:11; 25:6) as a direction of some significance. Movement to the east in Genesis is in the context of judgment (4:16) or vanity (11:2; 13:11) or alienation (25:6). The same is true with Jacob. The journey to the east is filled with heartaches and is far from ideal. It is not until Jacob journeys to the west (i.e., his return to Canaan) that peace comes.”

As He did with Eliezer in chapter 24<sup>354</sup>, God providentially led Jacob to the right place (a well<sup>355</sup>, verse 2) at the right time (when Rachel arrives, verse 6) to meet the right person (a relative, verse 6; cf. 28:2) for the right purpose (marriage). In verse 5, Jacob calls Laban the “son” of Nahor, even though Laban was actually Nahor’s grandson (see Genesis 24:15); Jews would often call a male forefather “father” (whether father, grandfather, great grandfather, etc.) and a male descendant “son” (whether son, grandson, great grandson, etc.).

### **29:9-14**

Perhaps because Laban had no sons at the time (according to 30:35 and 31:1, he eventually did) or perhaps because any sons he may have had at the time were not old enough, Rachel was in charge of her father’s sheep (verse 9). Jacob no doubt made quite a first impression on Rachel by single-handedly removing the “great” (29:2) stone

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<sup>353</sup> The Hebrew literally reads “lifted up his feet.” Commenting on these words, Ross (p. 501) states: “After the vision at Bethel there was a new spring in Jacob’s walk. Esau no longer concerned him; now he was on a mission with the Lord’s promise of protection and provision. This clue strongly suggests that Jacob’s confidence in the Lord’s direction to Laban’s house was very high.”

<sup>354</sup> As mentioned previously (see footnote 299), the incident in Genesis 24, the one here at the start of Genesis 29, and the one in Exodus 2 bear many striking similarities. Hamilton (2:254) states in this regard: “In several ways Jacob’s first encounter with Rachel and Laban parallels the encounter of Abraham’s servant with Rebekah (24:10-33) and Moses’ encounter with the daughters of Jethro (Exod. 2:15-21). (1) The hero (or his representative) goes to a distant land. (2) He stops at a well. (3) A girl (or girls) comes to the same well to draw water. (4) The hero draws water for them, or she for him. (5) The girl (or girls) returns home and reports the meeting to a brother or father. (6) The man is brought to the girl’s house. (7) Subsequently a marriage takes place between the man at the well (or the man whom he represents) and the girl (or one of the girls) at the well. The two Genesis stories contain the further parallels that the strange land is in fact the land of the father (or his ancestors), and that the girl who comes to draw water is a cousin or the daughter of a cousin of the groom-to-be.”

<sup>355</sup> It is quite possible that God led Jacob to the exact same well to which He led Eliezer in chapter 24.

from the mouth of the well<sup>356</sup> and watering her sheep (verse 10; cf. 29:2-3 and 8; in watering Rachel's sheep, Jacob was mimicking his mother, Rebekah—see Genesis 24:18-20). In a rare move<sup>357</sup>, Jacob kissed Rachel (verse 11). After Jacob identified himself, Rachel ran home with the news (verse 12). As soon as Laban heard the news, he ran to meet Jacob (the running is reminiscent of the running in the chapter 24 incident; see footnote 302), then brought him to his home (verse 13).

### **29:15-30**

After Jacob had worked a month for Laban for free (29:14), Laban offered to put him on the payroll (verse 15). When Laban asked Jacob what his salary demands were (verse 15), Jacob asked for the hand of Laban's daughter, Rachel in marriage in exchange for seven years of employment<sup>358</sup> (verse 18). Laban agreed to Jacob's terms (verse 19). Rachel, like the previous matriarchs (Sarah, 12:11 and 14; Rebekah, 24:16 and 26:7), was physically attractive ("beautiful," verse 17a). Rachel's looks are contrasted with those of her older sister, Leah, who is described as having eyes that were "tender" (verse 17a). According to Davis (p. 246), this means that Leah's eyes "were apparently pale and lacked luster."<sup>359</sup> Hamilton (2:259), by contrast, understands the Hebrew word to signify attractive eyes, stating: "Leah may be older, but her eyes are the beautiful eyes of a person who looks much younger" (some translations say that her eyes were

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<sup>356</sup> Hamilton (2:255) calls Jacob's exploit "a feat of herculean strength" and "Samsonesque." Sailhamer (p. 198) states in this regard: "One gets the impression early in the story that Jacob was going to do a mighty deed because of the special care with which the writer describes the size of the rock covering the well and the number of shepherds already on hand. Only when all the shepherds are present are the men able to lift the rock from the well and water the flocks (vv. 3, 8), because the rock was big (v. 2). When Jacob saw Rachel, however, and the shepherds identified her as the daughter of Laban, he single-handedly removed the rock and watered her sheep (v. 10)." Was Jacob naturally so strong? Did God supernaturally give him superhuman strength for the task (like He did Samson)? Or was it an adrenaline rush generated by the arrival of Rachel?

<sup>357</sup> "This is one of the rare instances in a biblical narrative of a man kissing a woman" (Hamilton, 2:256). "This is the only place in biblical narrative where we read of a man kissing a woman who is not his wife or mother" (Hughes, p. 367).

<sup>358</sup> "The agreement reached between Laban and Jacob is intended to provide for the bride price that was an essential part of marriage contracts. This was a payment made from the groom or his family to the family of the bride. Its function was to serve as a trust fund of sorts to provide for the support of the wife should the husband divorce her or die. ... [T]he typical bride price was thirty to forty shekels. Since a shepherd's annual wage was ten shekels a year, Jacob is in effect paying a premium by working seven years .... Theoretically, Laban will garner Jacob's would-be wages and secure them into a bride-price account of some sort" (Walton, *Genesis*, p. 586).

<sup>359</sup> According to one Jewish source, "Leah's eyes were 'weak' on account of her weeping over the possibility that, as the elder sister, she would have to marry Esau, the older brother" (Hamilton, 2:258).

“lovely”). In either case, it is clear that Rachel was the more attractive of the two. Jacob’s love for Rachel was such that the seven-year wait to marry her “seemed unto him but a few days” (verse 20; cf. 27:44).<sup>360</sup>

At the end of the seven years, Jacob was raring and ready to marry Rachel (verse 21). Laban proceeded to throw a wedding feast (verse 22), presumably for Jacob and Rachel. However, on the wedding night, Laban deceived Jacob by secretly substituting Leah in Rachel’s place (verse 23).<sup>361</sup> Thus, Jacob got a taste of his own medicine. Just as the deceiver in chapter 26 (Isaac) became the deceived in chapter 27, so the deceiver in chapter 27 (Jacob) became the deceived here in chapter 29. As He does time after time throughout the book of Genesis (and throughout history), however, God will overrule, using a sinful act of man to bring about His decreed end (without, of course, endorsing the sinful act<sup>362</sup>), for it is through the union of Jacob & Leah that Judah will be born, the one through whom the chosen line will continue, a line which will ultimately culminate in the birth of “the Lion of the tribe of Juda” (Revelation 5:5; cf. Genesis 49:9-10 and Hebrews 7:14), the Lord Jesus Christ.

Back to our story. When morning came and Jacob realized what had happened, he confronted Laban (verse 25). Laban’s reply, containing as it did the word “firstborn” (verse 26), no doubt hit home with Jacob, reminding him of his deception in chapter 27.<sup>363</sup> Just as the younger, Jacob, deceptively substituted himself in the place of the older/firstborn, Esau, in chapter 27, so Laban deceptively substituted the older/firstborn, Leah, in the place of the younger, Rachel, in chapter 29. Jacob’s sin had come back to haunt him (Ross, p. 497). You reap what you sow (Proverbs 11:18, 22:8, Hosea 8:7, 10:12-13, and Galatians 6:7-8).

Taking advantage of the situation, Laban made Jacob agree to work for him an additional seven years before giving him the go ahead to marry Rachel (verse 27), which Jacob did after the seven-day wedding feast celebrating his marriage to Leah, was complete (verses 27-28; cf. Judges 14:12-18).<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> “Time will not always pass so swiftly for Jacob. Later on, when he prepares to meet Esau, surely a few days will feel like seven years” (Hamilton, 2:260).

<sup>361</sup> How did Laban pull this off? The two most likely reasons are 1) it was night and 2) the bride was veiled.

<sup>362</sup> “Jacob’s deceptive schemes for obtaining the blessing did not meet with divine approval. Through Jacob’s plans God’s will had been accomplished; but the writer is intent on pointing out, as well, that the schemes and tricks were not of God’s design” (Sailhamer, p. 199).

<sup>363</sup> “How these words must have brought back Jacob’s own deception! ... Laban’s stinging words are left without any editorial comment—the event itself was God’s rebuke and discipline of Jacob” (Ross, p. 503).



### **29:31-35**

To compensate for Leah's inferior status, God opened her womb (children most certainly are "an heritage of the LORD," Psalm 127:3; cf. Genesis 33:5 and 48:9), while keeping Rachel's closed (verse 31; cf. 30:2). In apparent rapid succession, Leah conceived and gave birth to four sons: Reuben (verse 32), Simeon (verse 33), Levi (verse 34), and Judah (verse 35). One of Levi's more famous descendants was Moses (in this we see how God overruled, using Laban's sin for good). It is interesting to notice that at the birth of her first three sons, Leah's focus is on herself, specifically her relationship with her husband, while at the birth of her fourth son, her focus is where it should be, on the Lord ("Now will I praise the LORD," verse 35).

### **30:1-8**

In chapter 30, we read of the continued fruitfulness of Jacob's family, as well as of the fruitfulness of his flocks (Ross, p. 497).

Just as Hagar's ability to conceive caused her mistress, Sarai, who was unable to conceive, great grief (16:4-5), so Leah's ability to conceive caused her sister, Rachel, who was unable to conceive, great grief (verses 1<sup>365</sup>-2). Like Sarai before her (in chapter 16), Rachel had the right end in mind, but used the wrong means to achieve it by giving her maid, Bilhah to Jacob in order that she might serve as Rachel's surrogate (verses 3<sup>366</sup>-4). Bilhah bore Jacob two sons: Dan (verses 5-6) and Naphtali (verses 7-8). The words of verse 8 are much like those found in Genesis 32:28.

### **30:9-13**

Not to be outdone by her younger sister, Leah likewise has her maid, Zilpah serve as her surrogate (verse 9). Like Rachel's maid before her, Leah's maid bears Jacob two sons: Gad (verses 10-11) and Asher (verses 12-13).

### **30:14-21**

During wheat harvest (in the spring), Leah's oldest son, Reuben found some "mandrakes"<sup>367</sup> (verse 14a). In words reminiscent of Esau's in 25:30, Rachel asked

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<sup>364</sup> In going ahead and marrying Rachel anyway, Jacob commits the sin of polygamy. Once again, however, God overrules, using this illicit union to bring about Joseph, whom God would use to spare the young, fledgling nation of Israel from extinction later in the book of Genesis, thus keeping the fertility promise on track.

<sup>365</sup> Hamilton (2:270) points out the irony of Rachel's words in verse 1 ("Give me children, or else I die"): "It is ironic that Rachel, who believes she will die if she mothers no children ... dies while trying to mother a second child (35:16-19)."

<sup>366</sup> Verse 3's "bear upon my knees" (cf. Genesis 50:23) "most likely refers to adoption" (Hamilton, 2:270).

<sup>367</sup> "The mandrake is an herb of the Belladonna family with white and reddish blossoms. Its yellow fruit is similar in size and shape to a small apple" (Davis, p. 248). Hamilton (2:274)

Leah for some (verse 14b). Like Jacob & Esau in chapter 25, Leah & Rachel make a deal: Rachel will get some mandrakes, while Leah will get to have physical relations with Jacob that night (verses 15-16). Leah got the better end of the deal, as her renewed relations with Jacob resulted in her conceiving and giving birth to two more sons and a daughter<sup>368</sup>: Issachar (verses 17-18), Zebulun (verses 19-20), and Dinah (verse 21).<sup>369</sup>

### **30:22-24**

God “remembered”<sup>370</sup> (cf. 8:1 and comments on) Rachel by opening her previously closed womb (verse 22<sup>371</sup>; cf. 29:31), giving her a son, Joseph (verses 23-24) and thereby taking away her reproach (cf. Isaiah 4:1 and Luke 1:25). As God answered Rachel’s prayer for a first son (see footnote 371 below), so He would answer her prayer for a second son (“The LORD shall add to me another son,” verse 24) later in Genesis (35:16-18).

### **30:25-43**

Having served Laban for at least fourteen years and being the husband of two wives (four if one considers Bilhah and Zilpah wives, rather than concubines) and the father of

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describes the mandrake in a slightly different way: “There is no stalk, but large leaves fan out from the root at ground level. In the midst of these leaves appear violet flowers and yellow fruit. This fruit, which looks like a tomato, ripens in March and April, and emits a very distinct odor.” Mathews (2:486) adds: “The plant exhibits long, dark green leaves in a rosette pattern; from the center of the leaves are flower stalks that each produce a ‘purple, bluish, or greenish-white flower.’ During the spring the plant produces a yellow-red fruit, likened to a plum in size and shape. Moldenke and Moldenke describe their appearance like ‘yellow bird eggs in a shallow nest.’”

<sup>368</sup> Jacob would father at least one other daughter besides Dinah (see Genesis 37:35 and 46:7).

<sup>369</sup> There is some irony in all of this. Due to the ancient belief that the mandrake was an aphrodisiac (cf. Solomon 7:13), it may very well be that Rachel was planning on using the mandrakes to help solve her infertility problem. Rather than her womb being opened, however, it was Leah’s womb that was opened as a result of the trade that was made. Davis (p. 248) states in this regard: “Peoples in the ancient Near East thought mandrakes stimulated sensual desire and aided conception. It is interesting that while Rachel got the mandrakes, Leah gained another son (vv. 15-18)!”

<sup>370</sup> Commenting on this word, Calvin (2:148) states: “Since with God nothing is either *before* or *after*, but all things are present, he is subject to no forgetfulness, so that, in the lapse of time, he should need to be reminded of what is past. But the Scripture describes the presence and memory of God from the effect produced upon ourselves, because we conceive him to be such as he appears to be by his acts.”

<sup>371</sup> That God “hearkened to her” (verse 22) likely implies that she had been praying for an end to her infertility (cf. footnote 193).

twelve children (11 boys and 1 girl), Jacob was ready to head back home to the land of Canaan (verses 25-26). Laban did not want Jacob to leave, because he readily recognized that Jacob was a big reason for his riches (verse 27). As happens so many times in the book of Genesis, a deal is struck: Jacob agrees to stay with Laban in exchange for some of Laban's flock (before, it was in exchange for one of Laban's daughters) (verses 28-34). Specifically, any uncommonly-colored goats and sheep would be Jacob's, the rest Laban's. All other things being equal, Laban would retain the overwhelming majority of such animals.<sup>372</sup> In order to tip the scales in his favor, Laban removed all the uncommonly-colored animals and sent them far away with his sons (verses 35-36), lest they breed with the commonly-colored ones and thereby produce uncommonly-colored offspring (Jacob will steal a page from Laban's playbook in verse 40). In keeping with "the common belief that a vivid sight during conception or pregnancy would leave its mark on the embryo" (Ross, p. 522), Jacob placed multi-colored rods in the watering troughs, the place where the animals mated (verse 38), in hopes that the sight of the multi-colored rods would cause the animals to produce multi-colored offspring. In spite of (not because of) Jacob's superstitious method (Davis, p. 249), God caused the animals to reproduce in Jacob's favor<sup>373</sup> (verses 39 and 42b; cf. Genesis 31:9). Thus, God prospered Jacob (verse 43), as He had his grandfather, Abraham (Genesis 12:16) and his father, Isaac (Genesis 26:12-14) before him.

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<sup>372</sup> According to Hamilton (2:283), the best Jacob could expect was 20% of the animals.

<sup>373</sup> Hamilton (2:284) states in this regard: "How does Jacob manage to succeed? Do one-colored animals produce bicolored young simply by looking at a bicolored object in their mating time? This interpretation borders on sympathetic magic. Jacob's rods function much as do Rachel's mandrakes. It is not the mandrakes that produce fertility, and it is not Jacob's white rods that produce the right kind of offspring for Jacob .... It is God who opened Sarah's womb, and in 31:10-12 Jacob testifies that it was God, not magic, that brought about the desired results." Mathews (2:502) adds: "The Lord tolerated Jacob's imaginative devices and transcended them. God was pleased to bless despite whatever erroneous notions Jacob may have had about animal husbandry." Walton (*Genesis*, p. 590) writes: "This strategy is combined with folk traditions that conditions during breeding, such as what is in the animals' visual field, may have an impact on the offspring. This principle has no genetic logic or verification. Whatever level of success Jacob enjoys while using this procedure is attributable only to God, regardless of the conclusions Jacob may have drawn. God does not reveal to him new, successful strategies; he merely brings him success despite his strategies."

## Lesson 17: Genesis 31-32

In Genesis 31-32, the Jacob narrative (25:19-35:29) continues. In chapter 31, Jacob and his family, unknown to Laban, leave Haran and head for Canaan (verses 1-21). Upon learning of their departure three days later, Laban pursues them, overtaking them in seven days (verses 22-23). God appears to Laban in a dream, warning him not to harm Jacob (verse 24; cf. verse 29). Laban chides Jacob for stealing away (verses 25-28) and for stealing his “gods” (verse 30; cf. verse 19). Jacob responds to both of Laban’s complaints (verses 31-32), inviting Laban to search his stuff for the stolen statuettes. Due to Rachel’s runaround, Laban is unable to locate them (verses 33-35), leading Jacob to “go off” on Laban (verses 36-42). Laban, realizing that he had been had, suggests that he and Jacob enter into a covenant, which they do (verses 43-53), after which Laban returns to Haran (verse 55). In chapter 32, Jacob continues to make his way to Canaan. While on the way, he is met by some angels (verses 1-2). After this angelic encounter, Jacob sends word to his brother, Esau that he is coming his way (verses 3-5). Upon receiving word that Esau, accompanied by 400 men, was coming his way (verse 6), Jacob responds by dividing his crew into two companies (verses 7-8) and by crying out to God (verses 9-12). In an attempt at appeasement, Jacob sends a gift of 550 animals on ahead of him to Esau (verses 13-21). After sending his family on ahead of him (verses 22-23), Jacob, now alone, wrestles with “a man” and, in the process, has his name changed from Jacob to Israel (verses 24-32).

God had promised Jacob back in 28:15 that He would bring him back to the Promised Land. In chapters 31 and following, we see God fulfilling this promise, though both Laban and Esau seemingly stand in Jacob’s way. At the end of chapter 32, even God Himself in a sense stands in Jacob’s way.<sup>374</sup> Also at issue in these chapters is the fulfillment of the fertility promise. Would Laban and his kinsmen (31:23) or Esau and his 400 men (32:6) kill Jacob and his children, thereby wiping out the chosen line (31:29a and 32:11), or would God intervene to protect them? The answer to this rhetorical question is obvious (see 31:7 and 24 for the answer; cf. 12:17 and 20:6).

### **31:1-16**

Just as Isaac’s prosperity caused others to resent him (see 26:12-14), so did the prosperity of his son, Jacob (30:43-31:2). When it became clear to Jacob that both Laban and his sons were starting to turn on him (verses 1<sup>375</sup>-2), God’s command to Jacob to return to Canaan (through a dream, verses 10-13) was undoubtedly music to Jacob’s ears (verse 3). As He had previously (in 28:15, while Jacob was on his way from Canaan to Haran), God promised to be with Jacob on his way back to Canaan

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<sup>374</sup> “In the encounter [between Jacob and his wrestling opponent] the fulfillment of the promise seemed threatened. At Bethel a promise was given; at the Jabbok fulfillment seemed to be barred as God opposed Jacob’s entrance into the land. Was there a change of attitude with the Lord, who promised the land? Or was this threat a test?” (Ross, pp. 557-558).

<sup>375</sup> The ill will of Laban’s sons toward Jacob was undoubtedly motivated by the fact that they saw their inheritance going to Jacob, much like Esau saw his inheritance go to Jacob.

from Haran (verse 3<sup>376</sup>; cf. His promise to be with Isaac in 26:3 and 24). God's words to Jacob in verse 3 are slightly reminiscent of His words to Abraham in 12:1-3. Whereas there God told Abraham to leave his family to go to the Promised Land, here He tells Jacob to go to his family by returning to the Promised Land.

Before making the move from Haran back to Canaan, Jacob consults his wives about the matter (verses 4-16). In the midst of making his case to Rachel and Leah, Jacob rightly acknowledges God as the source of his prosperity (verse 9; cf. 24:35 and comments on). Furthermore, Jacob relates a dream he had, in which God told him 1) that the distribution of animals in Jacob's favor was God's way of settling accounts with Laban (verses 10-12; cf. the words of Rachel and Leah in verse 16a) and 2) to return to the Promised Land (verse 13). Just as Laban had swindled Jacob (verse 7a), so he had swindled his own daughters (verses 14-15<sup>377</sup>). Consequently, Rachel and Leah were just as eager to leave as Jacob was (verse 16b).

### **31:17-21**

With the full support of his wives, Jacob ends his 20-year sojourn in Padan-aram. Presumably because Laban was away shearing his flock (verse 19a), Jacob was able to leave without his uncle/father-in-law knowing it (verse 20). Just as Jacob had to "flee" to Haran (27:43), so he found himself fleeing from Haran (verse 21). Before leaving home, Rachel did a curious thing: she "had stolen the images that were her father's" (verse 19b; cf. Judges 18:18).<sup>378</sup> These "images" (cf. Judges 17:5, 18:14, 17-18, 20, 1 Samuel 19:13, 16, 2 Kings 23:24, Ezekiel 21:21, Hosea 3:4, and Zechariah 10:2) were human figurines (Davis, p. 251). They could be the size of a human (see 1 Samuel 19:13-16) or, as here in Genesis 31, quite small, statuettes. There is no consensus of opinion as to why Rachel stole her father's household idols. Hamilton (2:295) suggests that Rachel believed they would protect them on the journey ahead, a good luck charm

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<sup>376</sup> Commenting on this verse, Ross (p. 529) states: "The narrative just reported [in v. 2] that 'Laban's face was not with him' [a literal rendering of v. 2] but now records that the Lord would be with him." See also 31:5 in this respect.

<sup>377</sup> Hamilton (2:289) explains the words of Rachel and Leah in verse 15b: "Because Jacob 'paid' for his wives with service instead of money, they feel they are entitled to the equivalent of his service in money." Walton (*Genesis*, p. 590) further explains: "... [T]he bride price paid by the husband's family was supposed to be held in trust in the event it was needed to provide for the wife if she were abandoned or widowed. Jacob, of course, gave no bride price but his labor, so the equivalent of his wages should have been set aside for the women. Apparently that was never done. Jacob's labor has benefited Laban, not the women; thus, it is as if he has 'sold' them to Jacob."

<sup>378</sup> One cannot miss the humor in this. As Hamilton (2:292) states: "From a Hebrew perspective, of course, one might ask: 'Can one steal gods?' 'Is the destiny of a god at the beck and whim of a mortal?' The ancient reader would not miss the sarcasm in this story, for here is a new crime—'godnapping'!" See also 31:30.

of sorts. Along these same lines, Davis (p. 254) suggests that Rachel believed that they would make her womb fertile. Davis's other suggestion may be closer to the mark, namely, that their possession entitled one to the family inheritance (p. 254). Along these lines, Ross (p. 530) comments: "It was one thing to take his flocks and his family—but his household gods? For all he knew, Jacob might return some day and lay claim to everything he possessed." In the same vein, Sailhamer (p. 206) states: "Although a number of suggestions have been offered regarding the purpose of these 'gods,' v. 37 indicates that [they] may have represented Laban's wealth and possessions."

### **31:22-30**

Once Laban heard of Jacob's flight, he pursued and overtook his nephew/son-in-law (verses 22-23). Just as God intervened in Abraham's behalf through a dream to Abimelech (in 20:3), so He intervened in Jacob's behalf through a dream to Laban (verse 24; cf. verse 29). God gave Laban "a restraining order" (Hamilton, 2:310): "Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad"<sup>379</sup> (verse 24; cf. verse 29, 24:50, and 2 Samuel 13:22). Hamilton (2:296) translates: "Refrain from threatening Jacob with any harm." That hostilities were about to break out may be implied by Moses' use of the Hebrew verb translated "pitched" in verse 25, a verb usually reserved for militaristic contexts (Hamilton, 2:299-300). Understandably, Laban was upset at Jacob and let him know it (verses 26-28<sup>380</sup> and 30).

### **31:31-35**

In answer to Laban's complaint in verses 26-28 that Jacob had left without notifying him, Jacob states his concern that, would he have notified Laban, Laban would have taken his wives away from him by force (verse 31; cf. 1 Samuel 25:44). In answer to Laban's complaint in verse 30 that Jacob had stolen his gods, Jacob invokes the death penalty upon the culprit and invites Laban to search his belongings (verse 32). The suspense builds as Laban searches the tents of Jacob, Leah, and Bilhah & Zilpah to no avail before entering the tent of Rachel (verse 33). While neither Jacob (verse 32) nor Laban knew that Rachel was the culprit, the reader does (verses 19 and 32). Rachel avoided detection by hiding Laban's household idols in the camel's saddle upon which she sat (verse 34). "Oriental custom required children, regardless of age, to stand in the presence of their parents" (Davis, p. 251; cf. Leviticus 19:32). In order to prevent Laban from searching the camel's saddle upon which she sat, Rachel told her father that she could not rise before him because "the custom of women is upon me" (verse 35). "What a blow this development was to the teraphim—they were worthless gods, for a woman sat on them during her menstrual period" (Ross, p. 532). "Among the ancients 'the way of women' was considered to be a state of impurity and thus contaminating. Rachel's

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<sup>379</sup> "In other words, Laban was not to get Jacob to return, either by inducements or by force" (Davis, p. 251).

<sup>380</sup> The KJV's "sons" in verse 28, while a literal translation, is an inaccurate one. A more accurate translation would be "grandsons" (so Hamilton, 2:297) or even "grandchildren" (so NIV). See comments on 29:5.

recline was therefore a calculated act of withering contempt for the gods of Mesopotamia. She treated them as worthless and unclean” (Hughes, p. 393). According to Leviticus 15:19-24, anything that came in contact with something upon which a woman sat during her menstrual period became unclean. Furthermore, Jews considered camels unclean (Leviticus 11:4 and Deuteronomy 14:7).

### **31:36-42**

Having seemingly been cleared, Jacob now takes the offensive and lets Laban have it, accusing Laban of falsely accusing him in the present (verses 36-37; cf. David’s words in 1 Samuel 20:1) and mistreating him in the past. In spite of the fact that Jacob had been an exceptional employee for twenty years (verses 38<sup>381</sup>-41a; cf. 31:6), Laban had not reciprocated in kind (verse 41b; cf. 31:7a). In verse 42, Jacob speaks of “the fear of Isaac” (cf. 31:53). This is an expression for God. Accordingly, the NIV capitalizes the word “Fear.” Hamilton (2:305) translates: “the Dreaded One of Isaac,” i.e., “the One of Isaac who inspires dread” (Hamilton, 2:310). See Isaiah 8:13.

### **31:43-55**

Laban takes one last shot (not unlike a child wanting to get in the last word in an argument) by making the outlandish claim that he still has claim on his daughters, grandchildren, and former flocks (verse 43a). Not wanting to press the issue any farther, however, Laban drops it (verse 43b) and suggests instead that he and Jacob “let bygones be bygones” and agree to a truce (verse 44; cf. the peace treaty of Abraham and Abimelech in chapter 21 and that of Isaac and Abimelech in chapter 26). As he did once before (in 28:18), Jacob “took a stone, and set it up for a pillar” (verse 45), then had his kinsmen make a stone heap (verse 46). The pillar and heap would be visual reminders of the treaty made between Laban and Jacob that day (verses 48 and 52). Accordingly, Laban named the heap “Jegar-sahadutha,” Aramaic<sup>382</sup> for “the heap of witness” (verse 47), while Jacob named it “Galeed” (“heap” in Hebrew is *gal*), Hebrew for the same (verses 47-48). In addition to naming the site at which they entered into covenant Jegar-sahadutha/Galeed, Laban and Jacob also named it “Mizpah” (verse 49), thereby calling God to witness (verses 49<sup>383</sup>, 50<sup>384</sup>, and 52<sup>385</sup>). The name Mizpah

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<sup>381</sup> Commenting on verse 38, Hamilton (2:306) states: “It is of interest that Jacob begins his autobiography with a reference to Laban’s *ewes*, which is the plural of the same word that is Rachel’s name. For twenty years Jacob has indeed cared for Laban’s ‘Rachels,’ all his ‘rachels’ and his one ‘Rachel.’”

<sup>382</sup> Approximately 1.5% of the Old Testament is in Aramaic, the rest in Hebrew. The Aramaic parts of the Old Testament are found in Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:12-26, Jeremiah 10:11, and Daniel 2:4b-7:28.

<sup>383</sup> I have seen the words of verse 49 written on merchandise intended for dating couples. In context, however, these words have the exact opposite connotation. As Ross (p. 524) states: “The treaty that they shared resolved the tension that had lasted for years, but it was a resolution in which the two men remained enemies.” Walton (*Genesis*, p. 592) adds: “It is not unusual today to ... find it [v. 49] inscribed on wedding rings. In using it this way, we show our

is derived from the Hebrew verb found in verse 49, translated “watch.” In verse 55, Laban departs.<sup>386</sup>

### **32:1-23**

The obstacle of Laban now out of the way, Jacob proceeds on his journey to Canaan. Just as Jacob had an encounter with God on his way out of the Promised Land while en route to Haran (at the end of chapter 28), so he has an encounter with Him on his way back into the Promised Land while en route from Haran (verses 1-2).<sup>387</sup> To commemorate the special occasion of verses 1 and 2, Jacob names the place where this angelic encounter occurred “Mahanaim” (verse 2), which means “two camps” or “two companies.” The significance of this name has puzzled interpreters. Perhaps the two camps or companies that Jacob has in mind are God’s (the angels he meets<sup>388</sup>) and his.<sup>389</sup> The overall significance of this encounter is captured by Ross (p. 541): “After leaving one danger [Laban], Jacob thus faced another [Esau]. But the glimpse he was given of the angels of God assured him, once again, of the divine protection accompanying him on his return to the Land of Promise.”

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misunderstanding of the words. Here in Genesis they express suspicion. Laban does not trust Jacob, and Jacob does not trust Laban. They both regret that they will have no means to keep an eye on one another and prevent mischief-making, so they commend one another to the watchful eye of deity. A paraphrase is, ‘I don’t trust you out of my sight, but since I can no longer personally hold you accountable, may God do so.’ It is hardly the sentiment that one would want on a wedding ring ....”

<sup>384</sup> Commenting on verse 50, Hamilton (2:314) states: “Laban, who time and time again has mistreated Jacob, now solicits a promise from Jacob that he will not mistreat Leah and Rachel. The irony of his request escapes Laban.”

<sup>385</sup> Not only does Laban call the God of Abraham to witness in verse 53, but also the god of Nahor and the god of Terah (the god of their father). In translating the latter two with a small “g,” I am following the lead of Hamilton (2:312). Of course, Laban is wrong to include the latter two. When Jacob takes his oath, notice how he omits the latter two.

<sup>386</sup> It is interesting to notice how Laban’s attitude toward Jacob changes from the first time they meet (see 29:13) to the last time (kisses for everyone but Jacob in 31:55).

<sup>387</sup> It is interesting to note that the Hebrew phrase translated “angels of God” in 28:12 and 32:1 is found nowhere else in the Old Testament but in these two verses.

<sup>388</sup> “As Jacob approaches the Promised Land, he also approached God’s encampment, where the angels of God had their encampment, or base of operations” (Ross, p. 541).

<sup>389</sup> Calvin (2:185) is of the opinion that both refer to God’s: “... [A]ngels were distributed in two camps on different sides of Jacob, that he might perceive himself to be everywhere surrounded and fortified by celestial troops ....”



After encountering God's "messengers" (verses 1-2), Jacob sends "messengers" to Esau in Seir/Edom<sup>390</sup> (verse 3) to let him know that he is returning to Canaan and will be passing Esau's way on the way (verses 3-5). In an effort to win Esau's favor, Jacob, through his messengers, approaches Esau in a spirit of submission (verses 4-5; cf. verses 18 and 20), but apparently to no avail, as Jacob receives word that Esau is coming to meet him, accompanied by four hundred men (verse 6). In light of Esau's disposition the last time Jacob was in town twenty years earlier (27:41), Jacob understandably interprets Esau's action in a hostile way (verse 7a) and takes appropriate action (verses 7b-8).

Next, Jacob "takes it to the Lord in prayer" (verses 9-12). Jacob "bookends" his prayer by claiming the promises God made to him. In verse 9<sup>391</sup> he claims the promise God made to him back in 31:3. In verse 12, he claims the promise God made to him back in 28:14. Jacob's words in verse 10a are worth committing to memory. The Hebrew words translated "I am not worthy" are literally "I am little." "To be 'little' describes one who lacks legal credentials to make a claim for himself, or a person who is totally dependent on another for his welfare" (Hamilton, 2:323). It is not until verse 11 that Jacob makes his specific request: "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau." In the end, "it was not Jacob's plan that succeeded but his prayer" (Sailhamer, p. 209).

In what was most likely a faithless act, Jacob seeks to appease Esau (verse 20) with an extravagant gift (verse 13), consisting of 550 animals, 490 of which were females (verses 14-15), leading Ross (p. 544) to exclaim: "In short, Jacob did not really want to find grace in the sight of his brother (verse 5)—he wanted to buy him off!"

### **32:24-32**

After sending everyone and everything else on ahead of him across the Jabbok River (32:22-23), Jacob found himself by himself (verse 24a). Moses' words in verse 24b, "and there wrestled a man with him [Jacob] until the breaking of the day," written without warning, give the reader the impression that this "man" who wrestled Jacob appeared out of nowhere. Who was this "man"? Hosea 12:4 calls him an angel. It is quite possible that he was the angel of the LORD (on the angel of the LORD, see comments on 16:7). Davis (p. 255) is of the opinion that he was an ordinary angel (if there is such a thing as an "ordinary" angel). Angels taking the form of men is not unusual in Genesis (see, for example, chapters 18 and 19). To give himself an advantage over Jacob, his opponent "touched" Jacob's hip socket, dislocating his hip (verse 25). The Hebrew verb translated "touched" here signifies a blow (Ross, p. 553); Hamilton (2:327) translates "struck" (cf. the use of the same verb in Job 1:19). Eager to break away from Jacob before the break of dawn, Jacob's opponent demands that Jacob release him (verse 26a). Jacob, dislocated hip and all, refuses to do so until his opponent first blesses him

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<sup>390</sup> For the significance of the names "Seir" and "Edom," see comments on 25:25, including footnote 319.

<sup>391</sup> In actuality, Abraham is Jacob's grandfather, not his "father." See comments on 29:5.

(verse 26b). Jacob's opponent grants Jacob his request (verse 29c), renaming him (as with Abram in 17:5 and Sarai in 17:15) "Israel" (verse 28), meaning "God strives"<sup>392</sup>, but not before making Jacob tell him his name (verse 27). Hamilton (2:333) captures the significance of this: "In disclosing his name Jacob is doing more than sharing information. He is making a confession about the appropriateness of his name. Only now would Jacob agree with Esau that Jacob is the perfect name for him (27:36). The acknowledgment of the old name, and its unfortunate suitability, paves the way for a new name." God opposed Jacob reentering the Promised Land as Jacob (Ross, p. 558). The latter half of verse 28 gives the reason for the name change: "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (cf. Hosea 12:3-4). Jacob had certainly striven with men (most notably, Esau and Laban); here he strives with God (through His angel). Accordingly, Jacob commemorates this incident by naming the place "Peniel" (verse 30; cf. other commemorative namings in 28:19 and 32:2), meaning "the face of God." According to Exodus 33:20, no one can see God and live to tell about it. In spite of the fact that Jacob saw God, he survived (if what Jacob saw was an angel of God, and not God Himself, this is the likely reason for his survival; if it was God Himself he saw, then God mercifully made an exception). His survival undoubtedly gave him confidence that he would survive his upcoming confrontation with Esau. Backing up to verse 29, Jacob asks his opponent to identify himself, but to no avail (cf. Judges 13:17-18).<sup>393</sup> Besides the naming, another way in which this incident was commemorated in Jewish life was through a dietary regulation (verse 32). "Even today Jews avoid eating the interior cord and nerve of the hind quarter of animals" (Davis, p. 256).

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<sup>392</sup> According to Hamilton (2:334), Israel means God will rule or strive. According to Ross (p. 554), Israel means "God contends" or "may God contend, persist." According to Derek Kidner (cited in Davis, p. 255), Israel means "may God strive [for him]." Others define the name with Jacob, rather than God, as the subject: "God's fighter" (C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, cited in Davis, p. 255); "contender with God" (Geisler, p. 50); "having power with God" (Benware, p. 47); "he struggles with God" (Egner, p. 25).

<sup>393</sup> Commenting on verse 29, Hamilton (2:336) states: "One wonders if 'Why is it that you inquire about my name?' is another way of asking, 'Jacob, don't you realize who I am?'"

## Lesson 18: Genesis 33-34

In Genesis 33-34, the Jacob narrative (25:19-35:29) continues. In chapter 33, Jacob and Esau meet and, contrary to expectations, reconcile (verses 1-11). Esau offers to escort Jacob and his entourage to Seir, an offer that Jacob declines (verses 12-15). While Esau returns to Seir (verse 16), Jacob instead heads to Succoth and settles there for a time (verse 17). From Succoth, Jacob relocates to, purchases property in, and builds an altar in the city of Shechem, located within the confines of the Promised Land of Canaan (verses 18-20). In chapter 34, Jacob's only daughter, Dinah is violated by a Hivite man named Shechem, who afterwards asks for Dinah's hand in marriage (verses 1-12). Dinah's brothers, bent on revenge, deceive the men of Shechem into being circumcised in exchange for the right to marry their women (verses 13-24). While the men of Shechem are incapacitated following their circumcisions, Simeon and Levi attack the city and kill all the men (verses 25-26), while their brothers loot the city and take the women and children captive (verses 27-29).

### **33:1-11**

For the first time in 20 years, Jacob lays eyes on his brother (verse 1a). Considering 1) Esau's disposition towards him 20 years earlier (see 27:41) and 2) the fact that Esau is coming his way with 400 men at his side (verse 1a), Jacob considers Esau's advance to be an adversarial one. Consequently, he divides his children among his wives and concubines (verse 1b), forming three companies: 1) the concubines and their children, 2) Leah and her children, and 3) Rachel and Joseph (verse 2). Because the concubines and their children were of least importance to Jacob, he places them first in line. Because Rachel and Joseph were of greatest importance to Jacob, he places them last in line. "This ranking probably fed the jealousy over Joseph that came out later" (Ross, p. 564). Unlike in chapter 32 (see especially "before me" in verses 16 and 20/"before him" in verse 21 and "behind us" in verses 18 and 20), Jacob takes the lead in verse 3 ("he passed over before them"), indicative of the change that had taken place in his life due to the incident at Peniel at the end of chapter 32.<sup>394</sup> When Jacob reaches Esau, he bows down to him seven times (verse 3), a common protocol in the ancient world (Ross, p. 564). Jacob's obeisance was ironic in light of 27:29's "Let people serve thee [Jacob], and nations bow down to thee [Jacob]."

The moment of truth comes in verse 4, as Esau begins running toward Jacob. Jacob, hobbled by a dislocated hip, cannot even run, let alone hide. From a human standpoint, Jacob is at Esau's mercy. From a divine standpoint, he is, as always, at God's mercy. God, who "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20), answers Jacob's prayer (in 32:11) exceeding abundantly above all that Jacob asked or thought: "And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell

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<sup>394</sup> "Here is an evidence of some genuine change in Jacob's style of operation. The pre-Peniel Jacob was insistent that he stay 'behind' his party .... Now the post-Peniel Jacob will be at the vanguard of his party. Jacob's 'pass on before me' ... shifts to *But he himself went on ahead of them* .... The inclusion of the independent personal pronoun before the verb accentuates Jacob's radical shift of position—from rearguard to vanguard" (Hamilton, 2:343).

on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept” (verse 4; cf. the reunion of the Prodigal Son and his father in Luke 15:20).<sup>395</sup>

Jacob’s response in verse 5b to Esau’s question in verse 5a (“Who are those with thee?”) is one every parent should commit to memory: “The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.” Children are a gracious gift from God (cf. Genesis 48:9, Psalm 127:3, and Isaiah 8:18).

In successive order, Jacob’s concubines and their children, Leah and her children, and Rachel and Joseph bow before Esau (verses 6-7), prompting Esau to ask Jacob, “What meanest thou by all this drove which I met?” (verse 8a). Jacob replies, “To find grace in the sight of my lord<sup>396</sup>” (verse 8b). “Not only is the post-Peniel Jacob courageous (‘he himself went on ahead of them’), but he is honest as well. Up until this point candor has not been one of Jacob’s more distinctive traits. Now it is. He is forthright with Esau about his intention to buy Esau’s forgiveness. He hopes that a generous gift would mollify any belligerent moves by Esau” (Hamilton, 2:345).<sup>397</sup>

At first, Esau declines Jacob’s “gift” (verse 9<sup>398</sup>). However, Jacob insists, causing Esau to accept it (verses 10-11). In verse 10, Jacob’s perspective changes. Instead of viewing the gift as a way to buy Esau’s favor, he realizes that he already has his favor; therefore, he urges Esau to accept the gift as a gift. Perhaps this is the reason Esau now feels comfortable receiving it; it is truly a gift, no strings attached.

At the end of verse 10, Jacob says a peculiar thing to Esau: “I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God.” Calvin (2:210) explains: “It is an accustomed form of speaking among the Hebrews, to call whatever is excellent, divine.” Hamilton (2:346) comments: “The surprise in ch. 32 is that Jacob saw God, and yet his life was spared. The surprise in ch. 33 is that Jacob has seen Esau, and yet his life was spared.”

Jacob’s use of the word “blessing” in verse 11 is likely an allusion to the incident in chapter 27 (Jacob’s deceptive reception of the blessing). Ross (p. 565) states in this

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<sup>395</sup> “For whence such an incredible change of mind in Esau, unless he had been divinely transformed from a wolf into a lamb?” (Calvin, 2:211).

<sup>396</sup> “Jacob’s approach to Esau with all the bowing and the use of the language of a servant to his lord shows an attempt to downplay if not nullify his status as Esau’s lord” (Ross, p. 561).

<sup>397</sup> Oddly enough, Jacob is trying to earn Esau’s grace (verse 8) by giving Esau a “gift.” Grace, however, cannot be earned (Romans 11:6).

<sup>398</sup> Commenting on verse 9, Hamilton (2:345) states: “Esau is able to call Jacob *my brother*. Jacob cannot yet reciprocate. In relation to Esau, Jacob’s label for himself is ‘your servant’ (vv. 5, 14). For Esau himself, Jacob’s designation is ‘my lord’ (vv. 8, 13, 14 [twice], 15). Now that they are reunited, Esau desires a fraternal relationship, but Jacob is unable to move beyond a formal relationship” (Hamilton, 2:345).

regard: “It was impossible for Jacob to give back the blessing, but it was not impossible for him to share the fruit of the blessing with his brother. This one word would be sufficient to recall the earlier tensions over the blessing, and it would indicate to Esau that Jacob was trying to make restitution for his wrongs.” Hamilton (2:346) states in this regard: “Jacob’s shift in terms [from ‘present’ in v. 10 to ‘blessing’ in v. 11] is not just for variety of expression. Jacob, who earlier had stolen the blessing from Esau (ch. 27), would now return a blessing to Esau. This is his way of attempting to make amends, without suggesting as much.”<sup>399</sup>

### **33:12-17**

Esau offers to escort Jacob and his entourage to Seir (verse 12).<sup>400</sup> Due to the many young among his family and flocks and the extra travel time they required, Jacob respectfully declines Esau’s offer, though he tells him that he will see him in Seir (verses 13-14). “All of Jacob’s concerns voiced at this point may be another subterfuge to distance himself once more from Esau. Does Jacob really intend to join Esau at *Seir*, Esau’s domain? .... These two verses [vs. 13 & 14], especially v. 14, however, indicate that post-Peniel Jacob is not above making false promises and offering misleading expectations to Esau” (Hamilton, 2:347). Esau modifies his offer to Jacob in verse 15, yet Jacob still declines it. “With Esau’s men traveling with him, Jacob must journey to Seir rather than to Succoth” (Hamilton, 2:348).

It appears that Jacob had no intention of going to Seir (Ross, p. 563). Once Esau and his entourage left for Seir to the south (verse 16), Jacob and his entourage instead<sup>401</sup> headed north a few miles (Hamilton, 2:348) to Succoth<sup>402</sup> (verse 17).<sup>403</sup> Thus, Jacob deceives Esau once again.<sup>404</sup> Old sinful habits die hard. While Jacob had good reason

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<sup>399</sup> “By a change of terminology ... Jacob signals to Esau that the present is in a way a reparation for the purloining of the paternal blessing twenty years earlier” (N. Sarna, quoted in Hamilton, 2:346).

<sup>400</sup> “Ironically, the four hundred men accompanying Esau turned out, not to be for battle with Jacob’s household and for taking his spoils, but rather for safeguarding the final stage of Jacob’s journey” (Sailhamer, p. 212).

<sup>401</sup> Hamilton (2:348) translates the start of verse 17: “On the other hand, Jacob, he ....”

<sup>402</sup> Succoth was so named because Jacob built “booths” for his livestock there (verse 17). The Hebrew word “Succoth” means “booths, huts, sheds” (Hamilton, 2:342).

<sup>403</sup> “But since he afterwards turns his journey in another direction, it appears that he feigned something foreign to what was really in his mind” (Calvin, 2:211).

<sup>404</sup> Not every commentator views Jacob’s action at this point as one of deception: “The text has been candid heretofore about deception and obfuscation by Jacob, and its silence here implies that Jacob’s action is not a violation of the peaceful intention agreed upon by the brothers” (Mathews, 2:573).

not to accompany Esau to Seir, he still should have been straightforward about his intentions.<sup>405</sup>

### **33:18-20**

Verse 18 marks a monumental moment in the life of Jacob, for it is the fulfillment of the promise God made to him back in 28:15, the promise to bring him back to the Promised Land. Twenty years after leaving Canaan, Jacob returns, safely (cf. 28:21) settling in Shechem. Like Abraham, his grandfather, who in chapter 23 purchased some land within the confines of the Promised Land from the locals, so Jacob purchases some land within the confines of the Promised Land from the locals (verse 19).<sup>406</sup> Also like his grandfather, Abraham (in 12:7-8, 13:18, and 22:9) and like his father, Isaac (in 26:25), Jacob builds an altar (cf. 35:7), which he names “El-elohe-Israel,” meaning “El (is) the God of Israel,” Israel being a reference to Jacob (see 32:28). Thus, with this naming Jacob fulfills the vow he made back in 28:20-21 (Hamilton, 2:350).

### **34:1-12**

In chapter 34, Moses records “one of the greatest tragedies recorded in the Book of Genesis” (Davis, p. 256). The chapter opens with Dinah<sup>407</sup>, Jacob’s one and only daughter going out “to see the daughters of the land” (verse 1); Hamilton (2:351) translates: “to be seen among the women of the land.” This verse appears to be saying that Dinah foolishly put herself in harm’s way.<sup>408</sup> One of the men of the land, Shechem

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<sup>405</sup> “Jacob was wise in not going to Seir, for such a journey would have interrupted his completing his vow; but he did not need to deceive his brother once again” (Ross, p. 565).

<sup>406</sup> This parcel would later become the burial site for Joseph (Joshua 24:32; cf. John 4:5 and Acts 7:16; the Acts 7:16 passage is a problematic one, as Stephen says that Abraham, not Jacob, was the one who purchased the site).

<sup>407</sup> According to Davis (p. 256), Dinah is 15 or 16 years old at the time.

<sup>408</sup> “Dinah is ravished, because, having left her father’s house, she wandered about more freely than was proper. She ought to have remained quietly at home, as both the Apostle teaches and nature itself dictates; for to girls the virtue is suitable, which the proverb applies to women, that they should be ... keepers of the house. Therefore fathers of families are taught to keep their daughters under strict discipline, if they desire to preserve them free from all dishonour; for if a vain curiosity was so heavily punished in the daughter of holy Jacob, not less danger hangs over weak virgins at this day, if they go too boldly and eagerly into public assemblies, and excite the passions of youth toward themselves. For it is not to be doubted that Moses in part casts the blame of the offence upon Dinah herself, when he says, ‘she went out to see the daughters of the land’; whereas she ought to have remained under her mother’s eyes in the tent” (Calvin, 2:218). “... [Y]oung Dinah was pushing at the edges when she ‘went out to see the women of the land’ (v. 1). Girls of marriageable age were not permitted to leave the tents of their people to go about visiting without a chaperone. In fact, the Hebrew term ‘went out’ bears a sense of impropriety. Likely she went out behind Leah’s back” (Hughes, p. 412). “Her excursion into their circles loosened the stone for the slide. Avoidance of the Canaanites would have been far safer” (Ross,

sees Dinah, takes her, and violates her (verse 2).<sup>409</sup> Though his actions in verse 2 seem to belie the fact, Shechem “loved” Dinah (verse 3; cf. verses 8 and 19). Consequently, he asks his father to “get me this damsel to wife” (verse 4; cf. Samson’s words to his parents in Judges 14:2).

Somewhat surprisingly, when Jacob finds out what Shechem has done to his daughter, he does nothing (verse 5; contrast the reaction of David in 2 Samuel 13:21 upon learning of the violation of his daughter). Per his son’s request, Hamor approaches Jacob, seeking to arrange the marriage of his son to Jacob’s daughter (verse 6<sup>410</sup>). Unlike their father (see verse 5), when Jacob’s sons learn what has happened to their sister, they are extremely upset (verse 7). The Hebrew verb translated “grieved” in verse 7 is the same one used in 6:6 to describe the LORD’s grief over the sin of mankind; its noun form is used in 3:16 to describe the pain of childbirth. Dinah’s brothers were grieved because Shechem “had wrought folly” (verse 7), which signifies a “serious disorderly and unruly action resulting in the breakup of an existing relationship whether between tribes, within the family, in a business arrangement, in marriage or with God” (A. Phillips, cited in Hamilton, 2:357).

In seeking to arrange the marriage of his son, Shechem to Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, Hamor negotiates with not only Jacob, but also Jacob’s sons/Dinah’s brothers (verses 8-10). Not only does Hamor seek their permission for his son to marry their daughter/sister (verse 8), but also encourages an intermingling of the two peoples through intermarriage (verse 9), cohabitation<sup>411</sup>, and commerce (verse 10). Such intermingling would later be explicitly forbidden, as it would have a defiling effect upon the Israelites (see, for example, Deuteronomy 7:1-6).<sup>412</sup> Shechem joins in the negotiations, offering to pay any price for the privilege of marrying Dinah (verses 11-12).

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p. 572). Ross (p. 572) places part of the blame on Jacob: “In the first place, Jacob’s family had settled in the vicinity of Shechem (33:18), rather than going on to Bethel as he had vowed, a vow he had to be reminded of (35:1).”

<sup>409</sup> For seeing leading to an illicit taking, see also 3:6 and 6:2. Hamilton (2:354) states in this regard: “First comes the desire, then the action when that lust is not checked.”

<sup>410</sup> Commenting on this verse, Hamilton (2:356) states: “Hamor faces great difficulties. He must try to convince Jacob that Shechem, who just violated Dinah, would now like to marry her. That is a proposal over which most fathers would not have to muse terribly long!”

<sup>411</sup> While God would give the Israelites the land of Canaan, as He had promised, He would not do so through compromise, but through conquest.

<sup>412</sup> “The bargain which Hamor tried to strike (vv. 8-10) probably reflects the Canaanites’ appeal to the Israelites in later periods, such as that of the judges; whenever the Israelites responded to this appeal, they were caught up not only in Canaanite culture, but in its idolatry and immorality” (Davis, p. 258).

### **34:13-17**

In a classic case of “like father, like sons,” Jacob’s sons “answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully” (verse 13). The Hebrew word translated “deceitfully” is the same one used of Jacob in 27:35. Not only did Jacob’s sons deceive the Shechemites, but they also profaned the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, circumcision by insisting that the men of Shechem be circumcised for non-religious reasons (verses 14-17). In light of the fact that Dinah was residing in Shechem’s house (34:26), the taking Jacob’s sons threatened in verse 17 would most likely have involved force.

### **34:18-24**

Hamor and Shechem have no trouble convincing their fellow Shechemites to agree to the demand of circumcision made by the sons of Jacob. In doing so, however, Hamor and Shechem omit a few key details, most notably the real reason for the deal.<sup>413</sup> Hamilton (2:365-366) states in this regard: “Nowhere in their speech do father and son indicate to the council members the real reason why they want all male Hamorites to be circumcised. They say not one word about Shechem’s passion for Dinah, his violation of her, or about Jacob’s sons’ ultimatum of what the price was for Dinah’s hand in marriage. Instead, Hamor and Shechem concentrate exclusively on the material gains intermarriage will provide their people. There will be more women than ever to choose from, to say nothing of the collegiality the Jacobites will bring to their city, along with their abundant livestock. Thus we have two cycles of duplicity going on simultaneously. Jacob’s sons are deceiving Shechem and Hamor, who in turn are deceiving their own villagers. The deceivers are themselves being deceived. This scenario of double deception we may recall from earlier days in Jacob’s life, where the perpetrator of deceit was also the victim of deceit” (see comments on 29:23).

As the Shechemites were about to find out, the sons of Jacob were not so “peaceable” (verse 21<sup>414</sup>). While Hamor and Shechem assured their fellow Shechemites: “Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of their’s be our’s?” (verse 23a), in the end the opposite occurs (see 34:28). The expression “all that went out of the gate of his city” in verse 24 “is a technical one referring to those male members of a community who are capable of bearing arms. Thus to go out at the gate of one’s city means to represent one’s community in battle” (Hamilton, 2:367).

### **34:25-31**

“The third day after the circumcision is the day on which the pain from the operation would be the most intense. The fever that would develop as a result of the operation

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<sup>413</sup> Another, although less significant, omission is seen by a comparison of verses 9-10 with verse 21. When speaking to Jacob and his sons in verses 9-10, Hamor mentions the potential of the Jacobites acquiring some of the Shechemites’ land. When speaking to his fellow Shechemites in verse 21, however, Hamor fails to mention this (Hamilton, 2:366).

<sup>414</sup> In verse 21, “large enough” is literally “wide of hands.” “Perhaps we are to imagine Hamor and Shechem holding up their two hands and spreading them apart as much as possible” (Hamilton, 2:364).



would only make the condition of the recently circumcised more intolerable. The men of Shechem would be least able to retaliate. In fact, retaliation would be ruled out” (Hamilton, 2:368-369). Accordingly, Simeon and Levi<sup>415</sup>, two of Dinah’s full brothers, avenge their sister’s defilement (cf. Absalom’s avenging of his sister’s defilement in 2 Samuel 13) by attacking the city of Shechem with a vengeance three days after the men of Shechem had been circumcised, killing every male and rescuing their sister (verses 25-26). After Simeon and Levi finished their raid, their brothers<sup>416</sup>, “like vultures” (Hamilton, 2:370), looted the city and took all the women, children, and livestock (verses 27-29).

Though Jacob chided Simeon and Levi for what they did<sup>417</sup> (verse 30; cf. 49:5-7), Simeon and Levi rejected their father’s rebuke (verse 31). While Jacob could be faulted for being too passive, his sons could be faulted for being too active. Jacob wrongly sought to appease, while his sons wrongly sought to avenge (Ross, p. 575). “Unfortunately, Jacob’s attitude later reappeared in the nation’s tolerance of the Canaanites. On occasion, God would need to use a Simeon and a Levi, or a Jehu, even though they were extreme in their violence” (Ross, p. 576). While Simeon and Levi may have had the right end in mind, they utilized the wrong means, taking justice into their own hands (contrary to Romans 12:19).<sup>418</sup> While the death of all the men of Shechem for what one man did may seem like a case of “overkill,” Calvin (2:227) explains: “... [I]t was not the Lord’s will that they [the Shechemites] should be so grievously punished for their fault; but he suffered [i.e., allowed] this signal punishment to follow the violation of one maid, that he might testify to all ages his great abhorrence of lust.”

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<sup>415</sup> “We would expect that these two men had help from their families, clans, or servants” (Ross, p. 569).

<sup>416</sup> Hamilton (2:370) translates the start of verse 27: “The other sons of Jacob ....”

<sup>417</sup> Commenting on verse 30, Hamilton (2:371) states: “It is ironic to hear Jacob venting his disgust over Simeon’s and Levi’s failure to honor their word, especially in terms of its potential consequence for Jacob, for he had done exactly that on more than one occasion. One need only recall events as recent as those in ch. 33, where Jacob gave Esau his word that he would follow Esau to Seir, only to take off for Succoth and Shechem. Why might the sons be rebuked for backing out of a commitment, while it is permissible for the father to back out of his commitment? Why is Jacob’s subterfuge in ch. 33 acceptable, while his sons’ subterfuge in ch. 34 is not?”

<sup>418</sup> “Yet they [the sons of Jacob] wrongfully appropriate to themselves the right of taking revenge: why do they not rather reflect thus; ‘God, who has received us under his care and protection, will not suffer this injury to pass unavenged; in the meantime, it is our part to be silent, and to leave the act of punishing, which is not placed in our hands, entirely to his sovereign will’” (Calvin, 2:221-222).

## Lesson 19: Genesis 35:1-37:1

In Genesis 35, the Jacob narrative (25:19-35:29) comes to a close. At the start of the chapter, Jacob relocates from Shechem to Bethel at the command of God (verses 1-7). Once there, Rebekah's nurse, Deborah dies (verse 8). In Bethel, God appears to Jacob (verses 9-15), reiterating his name change (verse 10) and the fertility (verse 11) and land (verse 12) promises of the Abrahamic covenant. Consequently, Jacob, as he did at God's appearance to him at Bethel in chapter 28, builds and anoints a pillar (verse 14; cf. 28:18) and names the locale Bethel (verse 15; cf. 28:19). Jacob leaves Bethel and heads south. On the way, Rachel dies while giving birth to Benjamin (verses 16-18). Jacob buries her and marks her grave (verses 19-20). Jacob and his family continue journeying south, sojourning in an area "beyond the tower of Edar" (verse 21). While living in this locale, Jacob's oldest son, Reuben commits incest with his father's concubine, Bilhah (verse 22a). In verses 22a-26, Moses lists the twelve sons of Jacob, now that the twelfth and final one, Benjamin had been born. Jacob continues journeying south and arrives in Hebron, where his father, Isaac is (verse 27). Isaac dies at the age of 180, and Jacob and Esau bury him (verses 28-29). Chapter 36 is devoted to Esau, consisting primarily of genealogies, of him and of the inhabitants of Seir, whom Esau dispossessed.

### **35:1-8**

At the end of chapter 34, Jacob's sons made life difficult for him (see especially 34:30). Perhaps because the survival of the chosen line was at stake, God moved Jacob and his family from Shechem to Bethel by commanding Jacob to make such a move (verse 1<sup>419</sup>). Significantly, God reminds Jacob of His appearance to him in 28:10-22 ("that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother," verse 1; cf. verse 7). This was God's way of reassuring Jacob that just as He had been with him then, so He would be with him now. The God who appeared to Jacob at Bethel prior to his departure from the Promised Land and was with him as he departed the Promised Land and while he was away from the Promised Land (28:15, 31:3, and 35:3) would continue to be with him now that he was back in the Promised Land.

In imitation of his grandfather, Abraham (see 18:19) Jacob spiritually prepares his household for the upcoming "worship service" at Bethel, commanding them: "Put away the strange gods that are among you [cf. Joshua 24:14 and 1 Samuel 7:3-4], and be clean, and change your garments<sup>420</sup>" (verse 2; cf. Exodus 19:10-15). It may be that the "strange [i.e., foreign] gods" included the teraphim Rachel stole from her father (in 31:19) and/or what was taken from the ransack of Shechem (in 34:27-29). Jacob's charges obey his charge (verse 4). Not only do they turn over their foreign gods, but

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<sup>419</sup> The words "go up" in verse 1 should not be interpreted to mean go north (Bethel was actually south, not north, of Shechem), but to go up in elevation, Bethel being approximately 1,000 feet more above sea level than Shechem was.

<sup>420</sup> "It is appropriate that Jacob, who has recently had his name changed, now encourages a change of clothes. Both changes speak of moral transformation" (Hamilton, 2:376).

also “all their earrings which were in their ears” (verse 4). These earrings were “probably cult objects” (Davis, p. 258).<sup>421</sup> Jacob buries<sup>422</sup> these objects under an oak tree (verse 4; cf. 12:6). Some “gods”!

While Jacob and his family journey from Shechem to Bethel, God protects them in a distinct way, thus perpetuating the fertility promise (verse 5; cf. Exodus 15:14-16 and Joshua 2:9-11). After safely arriving in Bethel (verse 6), Jacob obeys God’s command to build an altar there (verse 7; cf. verses 1 and 3). Altar building was a common practice of the patriarchs (Abraham in 12:7, 8, and 13:18; Isaac in 26:25). Jacob names the place where he builds the altar “El-bethel” (verse 7), meaning “God of Bethel.”

Chapter 35 records the deaths of three individuals near and dear to Jacob. The first is the death of Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah (cf. 24:59) in Bethel (verse 8). Deborah’s body is laid to rest under an oak tree in Bethel. This locale was named “Allon-bachuth,” meaning “oak of weeping.” It is interesting to note that Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse has been travelling with Jacob, Rebekah’s son. Rebekah apparently had passed away during Jacob’s 20-year sojourn in Paddan-aram<sup>423</sup> (there is no mention of her, only Isaac, upon Jacob’s return to Hebron in 35:27; her death is not explicitly recorded in Scripture, though her burial is in Genesis 49:31). Deborah most likely joined herself to Jacob soon after the death of Rebekah.

### **35:9-15**

Just as God had appeared to Jacob when he left for Paddan-aram (in 28:10-22), so He appears to him when he comes from Paddan-aram (verse 9). God appears to the patriarchs often in Genesis (to Abraham in 12:7, 17:1, and 18:1; to Isaac in 26:2 and 24). God reiterates<sup>424</sup> Jacob’s name change (verse 10; cf. 32:28).<sup>425</sup> “Jacob is

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<sup>421</sup> “The ear-rings were doubtless badges of superstition” (Calvin, 2:237). “It is unlikely that the reference here is to normal jewelry, but rather to ornaments that carried some kind of religious significance, possibly with iconic impressions on them” (Hamilton, 2:375).

<sup>422</sup> Calvin (2:236-237) takes Jacob to task for merely burying these items, rather than destroying them: “It seems, however, absurd, that Jacob should have buried the idols under an oak, and not rather have broken them in pieces and consumed them in the fire, as we read that Moses did with the golden calves, (Exod. xxxii.20,) and Hezekiah with the brazen serpent, (2 Kings xviii. 4.)” Adding credence to the words of Calvin are those of Walton (*Genesis*, p. 631): “Burying idols (35:4) is not the same as destroying them. In fact, the text more precisely says that Jacob hides them, not that he buries them. The Hebrew verb used is the same one used when Achan hides the spoils he took from Jericho by burying them in his tent (Josh. 7:21-22).”

<sup>423</sup> “By including the name Rebekah [in 35:8], the author helps his reader recall her character, she who instigated the deception of Isaac. Her punishment (implied at least) is that she will never get to see her son again” (Hamilton, 2:378; cf. comments under 27:5-17).

<sup>424</sup> Hamilton (2:379) entitles 35:9-15 “Jacob is Indeed Israel.”

reminded that he returns to Canaan not as Jacob but as Israel. He is not only to bury the foreign gods, but he is to bury what has become for all practical purposes a foreign nature—a Jacob nature” (Hamilton, 2:381). God also reiterates the promises of the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob (verses 11-12; cf. 28:13-14).<sup>426</sup> As He did to Abraham in 17:1, God reveals Himself to Jacob as “God Almighty” (verse 11; for the meaning and significance of this name in this context, see comments on 17:1; cf. “I am the LORD” in 28:13). God commands Jacob to “be fruitful and multiply” (verse 11; cf. Genesis 1:28, 9:1, and 7), indicative of the fact that he and his family had an active and necessary role to play in the fulfillment of the fertility promise (God’s role, however, would be ultimate, 28:3 and 48:4). God promises Jacob that “a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee” (verse 11), a formulation of the fertility promise. The “nation” would be Israel/Judah; the “company of nations” would be the twelve tribes. God also promises Jacob that “kings shall come out of thy loins” (verse 11; cf. 17:6 and 16). This is a reference to the future monarchy.

After this divine visitation, Jacob, as he did in 28:18-19, commemorates the occasion by building and anointing a pillar of stone (verse 14) and by once again<sup>427</sup> naming the locale Bethel (verse 15). God’s reappearance to Jacob at Bethel with its reaffirmations undoubtedly strengthened him for the heartaches he was about to face in the near future (the death of his dearest wife, Rachel; the death of his father, Isaac; and the temporary loss of his most beloved son, Joseph).

### **35:16-22a**

The second individual near and dear to Jacob who dies in chapter 35 is his dearest wife, Rachel. While Jacob and his family journey south from Bethel toward Bethlehem/Ephrath (cf. 1 Samuel 17:12 and Micah 5:2), Rachel dies<sup>428</sup> while giving birth to her second son/Jacob’s twelfth son (verses 16-18; cf. 1 Samuel 4:19-22). The words of Rachel’s midwife in verse 17 are likely spoken with 30:24 in mind.<sup>429</sup> While Rachel

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<sup>425</sup> “Perhaps the repeated bestowal of the new name *Israel* both before Jacob is reconciled with Esau (ch. 32) and after he is reconciled with Esau (ch. 33) suggests that reconciliation with his estranged brother is a necessary prelude to his becoming truly ‘Israel’” (Hamilton, 2:381).

<sup>426</sup> It is interesting to note the many parallels between 17:1-8 and 35:9-12. In both passages, God appears as “Almighty God/God Almighty” (17:1 and 35:11), a name change is emphasized (17:5 and 35:10), the land (17:8 and 35:12) and fertility (17:2, 4-6 and 35:11) promises are made, and royal descendants are promised (17:6 and 35:11).

<sup>427</sup> “One way to explain the duplication is to say that here Jacob affirmed the naming he had earlier designated” (Ross, p. 581).

<sup>428</sup> There are some who suggest that Rachel’s death here is due directly to her deed in 31:19 (cf. 31:32).

<sup>429</sup> “It is ironic that Rachel, who earlier had proclaimed she would die if she had no children (30:1), and who gave to her firstborn the name Joseph, implying a yearning for another son

names the boy “Ben-oni,” Jacob names him “Benjamin” (verse 18). Ben-oni means “son of my sorrow” (Ross, p. 582)/“son of my trouble” (Ross, p. 579; Sailhamer, p. 219)/“son of my pain” or “son of my misfortune” (Davis, p. 258)/“son of wailing/mourning” (Hamilton, 2:385), while Benjamin means “the son of the right hand,” i.e., “son of good fortune” (Hamilton, 2:383).<sup>430</sup> Jacob buries Rachel’s body and marks the spot with a tombstone of sorts (verses 19-20; cf. 1 Samuel 10:2).

Jacob’s family continues journeying south, putting down stakes “beyond the tower of Edar” (verse 21; cf. Micah 4:8). While in this locale, Jacob’s oldest son, Reuben commits incest with his father’s concubine, Bilhah (verse 22). As with the violation of Dinah, Jacob<sup>431</sup> responds passively (he hears about the incident, but apparently does nothing about it). Reuben’s sin is not just a sexual one. It was also an attempt to usurp his father’s authority.<sup>432</sup> Because of this sin, Reuben forfeited his birthright (see comments under 25:27-34).

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(30:22-24), dies at the birth of this avidly looked-for second son” (Hamilton, 2:386; cf. footnote 365).

<sup>430</sup> “The right side represents in biblical thought images of fortune, goodness, and strength” (Hamilton, 2:385), a “place of protection and favor” (Walton, *Genesis*, p. 632), the “place of power and favor” (Mathews, 2:625).

<sup>431</sup> Notice how Moses begins to call Jacob “Israel” in 35:21 and 22.

<sup>432</sup> “Perhaps Reuben was prematurely attempting to replace his father as the patriarch by some pagan custom of taking over the concubines (cf. Absalom’s attempt in 2 Sam. 16:15-23)” (Ross, p. 583). “Reuben’s actions are not simply sexually motivated. The OT provides examples of a deceased king’s wives becoming the wives of his successor (2 Sam. 12:8). Closer to this passage are those narratives in which a man went into the concubines of another. Ishbosheth was disturbed when Abner went into the late Saul’s concubine Rizpah, not because of moral reasons but because he interpreted Abner’s action as a subtle move to grab the throne (2 Sam. 3:7). The same idea is operating when Ahithophel urges Absalom to take possession of his father’s ten concubines (2 Sam. 16:20-22). Through this move Absalom is making clear his intentions to usurp his father’s royal authority. Once he has reasserted himself, David will have nothing to do with these concubines (2 Sam. 20:3). Solomon so interpreted Adonijah’s request for Abishag (1 K. 2:22). Is Reuben simply engaging in sexual play? Or, more likely, is he attempting to usurp his father and take control of the family?” (Hamilton, 2:387). “... [S]laves, servants, and concubines were considered part of the inheritance passed on from father to son. The oldest son (Reuben) would have the birthright (the additional share) and would inherit the human members of the household, including the concubines. When inheritance is laid hold of prior to a father’s death, it constitutes usurpation of the father’s role ....” (Walton, *Genesis*, p. 636). Hughes (p. 424) suggests a further motive: “Here Reuben sensed that with Rachel’s death, her servant Bilhah would become Jacob’s favorite over his mother Leah. So Reuben seduced her to ensure that she could not rival Leah’s position.”

### **35:22b-29**

Jacob's twelfth and final son, Benjamin having been born, Moses lists the twelve sons of Jacob in verses 22b-26. Verse 26b must be qualified, as Benjamin was born in Canaan, not Paddan-aram.<sup>433</sup>

The third individual near and dear to Jacob who dies in chapter 35 is his father, Isaac. Verses 27-29 record his death and burial. Isaac's last days are spent in Hebron (verse 27). Jacob comes to his father there (verse 27; a "fulfillment" of 28:21). Like his father, Isaac was "gathered unto his people" (verse 29; cf. 25:8; for the significance of this expression, see comments on 25:8). Also like Abraham, Isaac lived a prolonged (quantity) and pleasant (quality) life (verses 28-29; cf. 25:8 and comments on).<sup>434</sup> As Abraham was buried by his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac in the cave of Machpelah (25:9), so Isaac is laid to rest by his two sons, Esau and Jacob in the cave of Machpelah (verse 29; cf. Genesis 49:31).

Note: The account of Isaac's death at the end of chapter 35 is another (cf. chapters 10 & 11, as well as 25:7-11) case of "dischronologization" in the book of Genesis. While it appears that Isaac dies prior to the selling of Joseph into slavery (the death of Isaac being recorded at the end of chapter 35, the selling of Joseph into slavery in chapter 37), Isaac actually lives until his grandson, Joseph is nearly 30 years old.<sup>435</sup>

### **36:1-37:1**

This section of the book of Genesis is a "hairy" one (pun intended; see comments on 25:25), presenting the interpreter with several challenges.

36:1 begins the ninth of the eleven "these are the generations of ..." sections in the book of Genesis (see under "Structure" in Lesson 1). In this section (36:1-8) and in the following one (36:9-37:1), Moses quickly dispenses with the non-chosen line of Esau (one chapter) before moving on to a much more extensive treatment of the chosen line of Jacob (37:2 through the end of the book, 50:26—fourteen chapters).<sup>436</sup> Accordingly,

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<sup>433</sup> See Hamilton (2:389) for some possible solutions.

<sup>434</sup> "When it is said, *that he died old, and full of days*, the meaning is, that, having fulfilled the course of his life, he departed by a mature death; this, therefore, is ascribed to the blessing of God. Nevertheless, I refer these words not merely to the duration of his life, but also to the state of his feelings; implying that Isaac, being satisfied with life, willingly and placidly departed out of the world" (Calvin, 2:248).

<sup>435</sup> I am following the dates listed on the chart entitled "Chronology of the Patriarchs," found on page 15 of Walton.

<sup>436</sup> For the significance of this phenomenon in the book of Genesis, see footnotes 14, 97, and 313. For evidence of this phenomenon in the book of Genesis, compare the Cain genealogy (4:17-24) with that of Seth (4:25-5:32); the Japheth (10:2-5) and Ham (10:6-20) genealogies with

Davis (p. 259) calls this section a “parenthesis.” Throughout this section (in 36:1, 8, 9, 19, and 43), the reader is reminded that Esau is the father of the Edomites (cf. comments on 25:25).<sup>437</sup>

One of the “hairy” interpretive issues in this section involves the listing of Esau’s wives in 36:2-3. According to these verses, Esau had three wives<sup>438</sup>: Adah (daughter of Elon the Hittite), Aholibamah (daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite), and Bashemath (daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebajoth). According to 26:34 and 28:9, however, Esau’s three wives were: Judith (daughter of Beerli the Hittite), Bashemath (daughter of Elon the Hittite), and Mahalath (daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebajoth). The two lists are quite incompatible. Hamilton (2:392) has the most extensive discussion of this dilemma, offering four possible solutions, none of which are totally satisfying.<sup>439</sup> 36:4-5 lists the five sons of Esau.

Another “hairy” interpretive issue in this section is found in 36:6-8. The primary problem here is pinpointing the time when this separation between Esau and Jacob took place. Perhaps upon his father’s death (35:29), Esau relocated from Seir to Canaan, realized that the land couldn’t sustain both his livestock and Jacob’s livestock (36:7; cf. 13:6), and, consequently, moved back to Seir.

36:9 begins the tenth of the eleven “these are the generations of ...” sections in the book of Genesis (see under “Structure” in Lesson 1). Why a second genealogy of Esau? Ross (p. 586) suggests: “Possibly, once the family moved and settled (or conquered) Seir, a new record was kept with a new starting point, even though it continued the family history of Esau.”

36:10-14 lists the five sons (cf. 36:4-5) and the ten grandsons of Esau (cf. 36:19a).

36:15-18 lists the clans headed by the sons and grandsons of Esau (cf. 36:19b). In comparing the two lists, one notices that the name Korah appears twice (in verses 16

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that of Shem (10:21-31); the Ishmael genealogy (25:12-18) with that of Isaac (25:19-35:29); and the Esau genealogies (36:1-37:1) with that of Jacob (37:2-50:26).

<sup>437</sup> “The name Esau is identified by ‘that is, Edom’ (e.g., vv. 1, 8), throughout the chapter. Why such a concern? The solution lies in the future importance of Edom during the later periods of Israel’s history” (Sailhamer, p. 221).

<sup>438</sup> Esau’s polygamy, though not censured by Moses at this point (see footnote 99), is nonetheless condemnable. “Now, though Esau had children by three wives, in whom afterwards the blessing of God shone forth, yet polygamy is not, on that account, approved, nor the impure lust of man excused: but in this the goodness of God is rather to be admired, which, contrary to the order of nature, gave a good issue to evil beginnings” (Calvin, 2:252).

<sup>439</sup> “A fourth possibility is that the problem defies solution, and is akin to an attempt to unscramble an omelette” (Hamilton, 2:392).

and 18). Hamilton (2:395) suggests: “The double mention of Korah (vv. 16, 18) probably implies a time in Edomite history when a portion of the Korahites split from the Oholibamah group and joined themselves to the Eliphaz confederation.”

36:20-30 lists the sons and grandsons of Seir the Horite (the one after whom the land of Seir was named?). The individuals listed in 36:20-30 are included under the umbrella of Esau because Esau’s descendants eventually dispossessed the Horites, the inhabitants of Seir (see Deuteronomy 2:12; cf. 27:40 and comments on).

36:31-39 lists the kings who reigned in Edom prior to the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, kings who reigned during the days of the Israelite judges (Hamilton, 2:401).<sup>440</sup>

Chapter 36 ends with a list of other descendants of Esau who served as clan leaders (verses 40-43).

The first verse of chapter 37 concludes the second Esau genealogy by noting that Jacob “dwelt” in the land where his father (Isaac) “was a stranger.” Hamilton (2:405) states in this regard: “For Isaac *Canaan* was a land for sojourning. For Jacob it was a place of settlement.”

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<sup>440</sup> “What is most interesting about the king list is that it reflects an elective kingship rather than a dynastic one. If that is the case, then it is the only evidence of a nondynastic monarchy in the national states of the ancient Near East, with the exception of the election of Saul in which there was no provision for a son to inherit the father’s throne” (Hamilton, 2:400).



## Lesson 20: Genesis 37:2-38:30

In Genesis 37:2-38:30, the Jacob genealogy/Joseph narrative begins. This genealogy/narrative will encompass the remainder of the book of Genesis (through 50:26). As with the genealogy of Terah in 11:27-25:11 (which focused on Terah's son, Abram/Abraham) and the genealogy of Isaac in 25:19-35:29 (which focused on Isaac's son, Jacob), so the genealogy of Jacob focuses on Jacob's son, Joseph. Apart from a few interruptions (chapter 38, 46:8-27, and chapter 49), the remaining chapters of Genesis are a running narrative of the life of Joseph from his seventeenth year (37:2) until his death at the age of 110 (50:22).<sup>441</sup>

The story of Joseph is one of the most compelling stories of all time.<sup>442</sup> It is the amazing story of a man whom God in His providence raises out of a pit (chapter 37) and a prison (39:20-41:14) and places in a palace<sup>443</sup> (41:38-44) in order to preserve His people (45:5-7 and 50:20), thus keeping the fertility promise on track.

The Joseph narrative (37:2-50:26) begins with Joseph at the age of seventeen (37:2). Moses records several incidents that caused Joseph's brothers to resent him (37:2-11). When Jacob/Israel sends Joseph to check on his brothers (37:12-17), his brothers seize the opportunity and seize Joseph, intending to murder him (37:18-20). Through the intervention of Reuben, Joseph's life is spared (37:21-24). While Reuben is away, however, Judah convinces the rest to sell Joseph into slavery to an Egypt-bound caravan of Ishmaelites/Midianites (37:25-28). To cover up their crime, Joseph's brothers fake his death at the hands of a wild animal (37:31-33), causing their father unconsolable grief (37:34-35). Chapter 37 ends with the note that the Midianites sold Joseph to an Egyptian military official, Potiphar (verse 36). The story is picked up at this point in chapter 39.

In chapter 38, the focus temporarily turns from Joseph to Joseph's half-brother, Judah. Judah is presented in a less-than-flattering light in this chapter. His problems begin with marriage to a Canaanite woman (verses 1-2), who bears him three sons (verses 3-5). Judah's oldest son, Er marries a woman named Tamar (verse 6), then is killed by God for being evil (verse 7). Judah's middle son, Onan refuses to carry out his commission to perpetuate his deceased brother's line and is, consequently, also killed by God (verses 8-10). Tamar is then promised that Judah's youngest son, Shelah will become her husband once he attains marriageable age (verse 11). Judah fails to keep this promise (verse 14). After Judah's wife dies (verse 12), Tamar takes matters into her

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<sup>441</sup> Fee & Stuart (p. 32) call the Joseph narrative the longest running narrative in the Bible.

<sup>442</sup> "The story of Joseph is regarded as among the best short stories of the world ...." (Davis, p. 262).

<sup>443</sup> Davis (p. 261) entitles this section of Genesis (chapters 37-50), "From a Pit to a Palace." In like manner, Charles Swindoll subtitled a book he wrote on the life of Joseph, *From Pit to Pinnacle*.

own hands, prostituting herself and deceiving her father-in-law, Judah into having physical relations with her (verses 13-18). This illicit union results in Tamar becoming pregnant (verse 18). When Judah hears of Tamar's pregnancy, he orders her to be burned (verse 24). Tamar avoids execution, however, by producing evidence implicating Judah (verses 25-26; cf. verses 17-18). In time, Tamar gives birth to twin boys, Perez and Zerah (verses 27-30).

### **37:2-11**

Verse two begins the eleventh and final of the "these are the generations of ..." sections in the book of Genesis (see under "Structure" in Lesson 1), a section that continues through the end of the book (50:26). As mentioned above, Joseph is the focus of this section; thus, I am calling it the "Joseph narrative."

This section (37:2-11) records several incidents that cause Joseph's brothers to intensely resent him. The first is the "evil report" about them that Joseph gives to his father (verse 2c).<sup>444</sup> The second is the favoritism Jacob shows toward Joseph (verses 3-4). In showing favoritism toward Joseph, Jacob was repeating the sin of his parents (see 25:28). Jacob's favoritism was nothing new (see Genesis 29:30 and 33:2).<sup>445</sup> Jacob's favoritism was clearly communicated by a "coat of many colours" (cf. 2 Samuel 13:18-19) he made especially for Joseph (verse 3). There is some disagreement as to the precise nature of this garment. Davis (p. 263) suggests three options: 1) a coat of many colors<sup>446</sup>; 2) a long-sleeved robe<sup>447</sup>; or 3) an ornamented tunic<sup>448</sup>. Perhaps the coat/robe/tunic was characterized by all three (colorful, long, and ornamented)?

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<sup>444</sup> Ross (p. 598), commenting on this "evil report," states: "A report such as Joseph gave about his brothers' activities, whatever they were, has never been considered the popular thing to do. It opens up the one who gives it to charges of being a tattletale from those who would take evil lightly. In fact the incident shows that Joseph was faithful to his father. Those who would be leaders must prove faithful in the smaller responsibilities. The story holds up this trait of Joseph's as exemplary."

<sup>445</sup> "But Jacob should have remembered from his own childhood as well as from his early marriage days what a display of favoritism would do to a family. It had separated him from his mother, and it would separate Joseph from him" (Ross, p. 598).

<sup>446</sup> So NASB text ("varicolored tunic"); so Geisler, p. 50 ("a multicolored robe"); so Calvin, 2:259 ("a coat woven of many colours"); so the Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate, and other ancient versions.

<sup>447</sup> So Sailhamer, p. 227 ("a coat of extended length,' literally a coat that extends to the hands and feet"); so Ross, p. 598 ("The traditional idea of 'a coat of many colors may not be what the text means. It probably describes a sleeved coat that reached to the wrists and ankles"); so RSV ("a long robe with sleeves"); so NASB marginal note ("full-length robe"). Hamilton (2:403) combines the two ideas of color and length ("long colorful tunic").

<sup>448</sup> So NIV ("richly ornamented robe").

According to Ross (p. 598), “Far more than being a nice gift, this tunic set Joseph apart from the brothers as the favored one, probably indicating that he would receive the inheritance (i.e., the leadership and the double portion).” A third incident that causes Joseph’s brothers to intensely resent him is a pair of dreams he has (verses 5-11). In the Old Testament era, dreams were a means of special revelation<sup>449</sup> (see Genesis 20:3, 28:12-15, 31:11, and 24). In the first dream (verses 5-8), Joseph’s brothers (represented by sheaves) bow down to Joseph (represented by a sheaf<sup>450</sup>). In the second<sup>451</sup> dream (verses 9-10), not only do Joseph’s brothers (represented by stars) bow down to him, but also his father (represented by the sun) and his mother<sup>452</sup> (represented by the moon). These dreams make Joseph’s brothers even more irate (verses 5, 8, and 11). It was one thing, however, for them to take issue with the favor Jacob showed Joseph; it was another thing altogether for them to take issue with the favor God was showing Joseph. The protests of his brothers (verse 8) and his father (verse 10) notwithstanding, Joseph’s dreams eventually came to pass (see 42:6, 43:26, and 50:18). Jacob’s reaction in verse 11b is reminiscent of Mary’s in Luke 2:19 and 51.

### **37:12-24**

The next chapter in the Joseph narrative opens with Joseph’s brothers pasturing their father’s flock 50 miles to the north (of Hebron) in Shechem<sup>453</sup> (verse 12). Jacob summons Joseph and instructs him to check on the well-being of his brothers and the flocks (verses 13-14).<sup>454</sup> Joseph unhesitatingly obeys (verse 13’s “Here am I”<sup>455</sup>),

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<sup>449</sup> Special revelation is “God’s particular communications and manifestations of himself to particular persons at particular times” (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 153-154).

<sup>450</sup> “A sheaf is something to eat, or something from which food is processed. Food, or the lack of it, will play a large part later in the Joseph narrative” (Hamilton, 2:410).

<sup>451</sup> Sailhamer (p. 226) sees significance in the number of dreams (2): “The fact that Joseph had two dreams that foreshadowed his future ascendancy over his brothers is to be understood in light of Joseph’s own words in chapter 41. There he explained to the Pharaoh, ‘The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms [... lit., “twice”] is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon’ (41:32). So here the matter is already settled at the beginning of the story. God will surely bring to pass the fulfillment of Joseph’s dream.”

<sup>452</sup> Rachel has already died by this point (35:19); thus, perhaps Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid is in view.

<sup>453</sup> It is interesting that the brothers go to Shechem, a place where they were probably not well liked, to say the least (cf. chapter 34).

<sup>454</sup> “Why would Jacob, if he is aware of his sons’ hatred for Joseph, send Joseph to visit his brothers? He would surely know what his sons would do to Joseph if, in their father’s absence, they got their hands on him. One must conclude that Jacob is unaware of the simmering rage of the brothers toward Joseph, that the brothers have not in any way, either through language or conduct, conveyed to their father the rancor they feel toward Joseph” (Hamilton, 2:413).

though he probably sensed the potential peril involved (cf. verse 4). As it turns out, Joseph would never return home again, spending the rest of his days (93 years) in Egypt.

Joseph arrives in Shechem, but his brothers are nowhere to be found. In one of the seemingly incidental, yet highly providential, turns in the Joseph narrative, “a certain man” (verse 15) happens to find Joseph wandering about in search of his brothers, a man who just happened to overhear Joseph’s brothers say they were going on to Dothan, 13 miles to the north (of Shechem). This divine appointment enables Joseph to find his brothers in Dothan (verse 17).<sup>456</sup>

Perhaps because of what he was wearing, Joseph’s brothers spot Joseph approaching and immediately plot his murder<sup>457</sup> (verses 18-20). Commenting on the words of Joseph’s brothers in verse 20, Sailhamer (p. 228) states: “Little did they suspect that the very plans that they were then scheming were to lead to the fulfillment of those dreams.” Ross (pp. 609-610) likewise states: “... [W]hen the brothers sought to kill Joseph and see what became of his dreamed destiny, a strange set of circumstances and voices of moderation worked to deliver Joseph alive to Egypt, where he eventually fulfilled this destiny. Far from preventing Joseph’s dream, the brothers actually became the agents of fulfilling it.”

In another providential turn, Reuben intercedes for Joseph, persuading his brothers not to actively murder Joseph, but to passively do so by allowing him to die of exposure and/or starvation in a cistern<sup>458</sup> (verses 21-22). When Joseph finally reaches his brothers, they strip him of his galling garment<sup>459</sup> (verse 23) and set him in a cistern (verse 24; cf. Jeremiah 38:6).

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<sup>455</sup> Hamilton (2:412) translates these words: “I am ready to go.”

<sup>456</sup> “... [T]he unseen hand of the Lord is apparent here. He is directing Joseph to discover his brothers so that the divine plan for the salvation of Jacob and many peoples (50:20) might be realized .... (Mathews, 2:695).

<sup>457</sup> As the hatred of Cain led to the murder of Abel (Genesis 4), so the hatred of Joseph’s brothers lead to their intent to murder Joseph. “It is the Cain and Abel story all over again” (Ross, p. 603). For the prominence of fraternal feuds in Genesis, see footnote 343.

<sup>458</sup> “Cisterns were shaped like a bottle, with a small opening in the top, and often covered with a stone. They were hewn deep in the rock, and the narrow vertical shaft near the top was for letting down pitchers. In most cases they would be waterproofed with plaster made from burnt and slaked lime. Joseph’s chances of escaping from a cistern are minimal” (Hamilton, 2:418).

<sup>459</sup> Joseph wearing his coat in Dothan is “like waving a red flag in front of a bull” (Hamilton, 2:426).

### **37:25-36**

With incredible callousness<sup>460</sup>, Joseph's brothers sit down to eat (they eat and leave him to starve; later, they will be the ones starving, while Joseph will be the one who will give them food to eat). In another providential turn, God sends an Egypt-bound caravan of Ishmaelites/Midianites<sup>461</sup> (verse 25). In yet another providential turn, Judah convinces his brothers (minus Reuben) to sell Joseph to these caravaners<sup>462</sup>, thereby sparing Joseph's life and placing him in Egypt<sup>463</sup> (verses 26-28; cf. verse 36).

Joseph's sale was disturbing news to Reuben (verses 29-30), who had intended to single-handedly rescue Joseph from the cistern and return him to their father (verse 22). Reuben's plans having been foiled, the brothers (another case in the book of Genesis of "like father, like son"<sup>464</sup>) devise a plan to deceive their father into thinking Joseph had been killed by a wild beast (verses 31<sup>465</sup>-33). Little did Jacob realize that a wild beast had not harmed Joseph, but a group of wild beasts (Joseph's brothers). In what can only be described as highly hypocritical, Jacob's sons (along with his daughters) try to console their father, but to no avail (verses 34-35).

In yet another providential turn, when the caravan arrives in Egypt, the Midianites turn around and sell Joseph to an official of Pharaoh, Potiphar (verse 36).

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<sup>460</sup> Their callousness is magnified in light of what is said in 42:21.

<sup>461</sup> The Egypt-bound travelers are alternately called "Ishmeelites" (37:25, 27, and 28) and "Midianites" (37:28 and 36); cf. Judges 8:22-28. According to Hamilton (2:423), Ishmaelite is the broader designation, while Midianite is a subset of Ishmaelite (i.e., all Midianites were Ishmaelites, but not all Ishmaelites were Midianites).

<sup>462</sup> The Law would later make such an act a capital crime (see Exodus 21:16 and Deuteronomy 24:7).

<sup>463</sup> "What happens to Joseph foreshadows all that will happen to the sons of Jacob. They will be carried down into Egypt and will be put into slavery" (Sailhamer, p. 229). In a similar vein, Ross (p. 590) states: "As with the preceding narratives, the story of Joseph is archetypal and didactic. It shows that, just as Joseph lived in bondage in Egypt before his deliverance and supremacy over Egypt, so would the nation. Just as suffering and the bondage formed tests for Joseph to see if he kept his faith and was worthy of the promise, so too the bondage of the nation was a means of discipline and preparation for the nation's future responsibilities."

<sup>464</sup> "... [T]he brothers' deception of the old patriarch once again brought pain to one who was no stranger to deception" (Ross, p. 604).

<sup>465</sup> Commenting on verse 31, Davis (p. 266) states: "There is a touch of irony here: Jacob, who had deceived his father with a goat's skin, was deceived by his sons with goat's blood."

### **38:1-11**

The Joseph narrative proper is “interrupted” in chapter 38 by “a bizarre episode” (Ross, p. 611) involving Judah, Joseph’s half-brother. According to Genesis 49:10, Judah would be the son of Jacob through whom the chosen line would pass. In spite of his favored status, however, Judah was just as spiritually feeble and frail as those chosen before him (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), as chapter 38 clearly shows.

The chapter begins with Judah leaving home and going to Adullam (10 miles northwest of Hebron), where he meets and marries<sup>466</sup> a Canaanite woman (verses 1-2<sup>467</sup>). “This act was out of harmony with the will of the patriarchs [and presumably, out of harmony with the will of God] not to marry Canaanite women” (Ross, p. 615); see Genesis 24:3 and 28:1 in this regard. Judah’s wife bears him three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah (verses 3-5).

Judah “took a wife for Er his firstborn,” a woman by the name of Tamar (verse 6). Because Er was “wicked<sup>468</sup> in the sight of the LORD,” God took his life (verse 7). In keeping with the custom of levirate<sup>469</sup> marriage (later incorporated into the Law, Deuteronomy 25:5-10), Judah orders his middle son, Onan to impregnate Tamar in order to perpetuate Er’s line (verse 8). Onan, however, is derelict in his duty<sup>470</sup> (verse 9), causing God to take his life also (verse 10). Because Judah’s youngest son, Shelah is too young to be married, Judah instructs Tamar to return to her father’s house until Shelah reaches marriageable age. Judah, however, has no intention of giving Shelah to Tamar, fearing that the fate that had befallen Er and Onan would also befall Shelah (verse 11; cf. 38:14).

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<sup>466</sup> The verb translated “took” in verse 2 is translated “married” by the NIV.

<sup>467</sup> On the possible significance of Judah’s seeing (“saw”) leading to his taking (“took”), see 3:6 and comments on, 6:2, and 34:2.

<sup>468</sup> The wickedness Er committed was evidently quite severe. The same Hebrew word is used earlier in Genesis to describe humanity at the time of the Flood (6:5).

<sup>469</sup> Levirate is taken from the Latin word for brother-in-law, *levir*.

<sup>470</sup> Onan’s offense was not a one-time one. “The syntax of v. 9 does not refer to one time ‘when’ Onan had sex with Tamar, but to *whenever* he had sex with her” (Hamilton, 2:436). Onan’s attitude lives on to this day. As Ross (p. 616) states: “This attitude of gratification without responsibility has been repeated from generation to generation in immoral people.” Besides the physical gratification involved, another reason why Onan may have done what he did is pointed out by Hamilton (2:436): “Num. 27:8-11 states that if a man dies without a son, then his inheritance is to pass to his daughter; if he has no daughter, then the inheritance is to pass to his brothers. Onan apparently does not want to father a son who will prevent him from receiving his deceased brother’s inheritance.”

### **38:12-23**

The story fast-forwards to the time when Judah's wife dies (verse 12). After mourning his wife's death, Judah goes to Timnath (4 miles northeast of Adullam) to shear his sheep<sup>471</sup> (verse 12). Upon hearing that her father-in-law would be going to Timnath (verse 13), Tamar positions herself "by the way to Timnath" (verse 14) and deceives (yet another instance of deception in the book of Genesis) Judah (yet another instance in Genesis of a deceiver, Judah in 37:31-32, becoming the deceived) into having physical relations with her by pretending to be a prostitute.<sup>472</sup> Judah takes the bait (verses 15-16a and 18b), and Tamar consequently conceives (verse 18b). The negotiations between Tamar and Judah in verses 16b-18a prove to be highly significant (see 38:25) and are, therefore, recorded by Moses. The "signet" and "bracelets" of verse 18 "probably was a cylinder seal carried around the neck on a cord" (Davis, p. 268). Both the seal and the "staff" (verse 18) apparently had distinctive features, clearly identifying their owner.<sup>473</sup> When Judah attempts to "pay the bill" and retrieve his pledge, Tamar is nowhere to be found (verses 20-21). Rather than risking further embarrassment, Judah lets the matter go (verses 22-23).<sup>474</sup>

### **38:24-30**

Once Tamar's pregnancy comes to light, Judah orders his daughter-in-law to be burned (verse 24).<sup>475</sup> Once, however, Tamar implicates Judah in the crime (verse 25), Judah backpedals (verse 26).<sup>476</sup> Tamar eventually gives birth to twin boys, Perez and Zerah<sup>477</sup> (verses 27-30). The delivery of Perez & Zerah is reminiscent of that of Esau & Jacob

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<sup>471</sup> Ross (p. 614) calls this time a "sheepshearing festival" (cf. 1 Samuel 25:8 in its context), a time when people would be in a festive mood (p. 616). According to Davis (p. 268), the time of sheepshearing "was often a time for licentious and unrestrained behavior."

<sup>472</sup> Several of the commentators exonerate Tamar. Hamilton (2:443) states: "Here then is an instance where the end justifies the means." Ross (p. 617) states: "The text of Scripture does not cast any moral judgment on Tamar ... It is not appropriate to judge her by Christian ethics, for in her culture at that time, her actions, though very dangerous for her, were within the law. She had the right to have a child by the nearest of kin to her deceased husband. She played on the vice of Judah to bear this child [actually, children], and her deception worked." This writer does not share these sentiments.

<sup>473</sup> Hughes (p. 454) likens them to today's driver's license and social security number.

<sup>474</sup> "Lighter is the loss of money than of character" (Calvin, 2:285).

<sup>475</sup> The Law would later go on to make fornication a capital offense (Deuteronomy 22:20-24). In certain instances, the means of execution was to be burning (Leviticus 20:14 and 21:9).

<sup>476</sup> The Law would later go on to prescribe death for one who committed incest with a daughter-in-law (Leviticus 20:12).

<sup>477</sup> Perhaps the most well known descendant of Zerah was Achan (Joshua 7:1).

(25:26). Perez would be the one through whom the chosen line would pass (see Ruth 4:18-22 and Matthew 1:1-17). Thus, we see how once again in Genesis God overrules the sinful actions of His people (in this case, the sin of Judah and Tamar) to accomplish His ultimate purposes (in this case, perpetuate the chosen line through an offspring of Judah & Tamar's illicit union, Perez).



## Lesson 21: Genesis 39-40

In Genesis 39-40, the Joseph narrative (37:2-50:26) continues. In chapter 39, the story picks up where it left off at the end of chapter 37. Joseph is sold as a slave by the Ishmaelites to an Egyptian official named Potiphar (verse 1). God is with Joseph; consequently, Joseph becomes prosperous, so much so that Potiphar makes Joseph his steward, a move that also makes Potiphar prosperous (verses 2-6a). Joseph was a fine-looking fellow (verse 6b); consequently, Potiphar's wife sets her sights on Joseph and propositions him repeatedly (verses 7 and 10). Joseph, however, repeatedly refuses her advances (verses 8-10). When Potiphar's wife attempts to force herself upon Joseph, he flees (verses 11-12). Scorned, Potiphar's wife takes out her fury on Joseph, falsely accusing him of attempting to violate her (verses 13-18); consequently, Joseph is unjustly imprisoned (verses 19-20). The Lord, however, continues to be with and prosper Joseph, so much so that the warden of the jail, like Potiphar before him, makes Joseph his steward (verses 21-23).

In chapter 40, Joseph becomes "pen pals" with Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker (verses 1-4). In time, each of these men has a dream, dreams that Joseph interprets (verses 5-13 and 16-19). Joseph's interpretations prove to be correct (verses 20-22). Joseph asks the chief cupbearer to plead his case to Pharaoh (verses 14-15). The chief cupbearer, however, forgets Joseph (verse 23).

In these chapters, notice how God in His providence continues to put the right people in the right place at the right time for the right purpose, leading to His ultimate purpose of putting the right person (Joseph) in the right place (the position of prime minister of Egypt) at the right time (during the 7 years of plenty, followed by the 7 years of famine) for the right purpose (saving the nation from starvation, thereby keeping the fertility promise on track).

### **39:1-6a**

The story of Joseph's plight is resumed from 37:36. Notice how in 37:36 the focus is on the Ishmaelites/Midianites (they sell Joseph to Potiphar), while in 39:1 the focus is on Potiphar (he buys Joseph from the Ishmaelites/Midianites). Thus, Moses makes a seamless transition from Joseph in the possession of the Ishmaelites/Midianites to Joseph in the possession of Potiphar. There is some question as to exactly what Potiphar's occupation was. Verse 1 calls him "the captain of the guard" (cf. 2 Kings 25:8 and Jeremiah 39:9-10).<sup>478</sup> Another option is that Potiphar was Pharaoh's chief executioner.<sup>479</sup> As with each of the previous patriarchs (Abraham in Genesis 21:22; Isaac in Genesis 26:24 and 28; and Jacob in Genesis 28:15), so the LORD was with Joseph (verses 2-3; cf. 39:21, 23, and Acts 7:9). God's presence brought the patriarchs

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<sup>478</sup> So Davis (p. 269), who calls Potiphar the commanding officer of the royal body guard.

<sup>479</sup> The Hebrew phrase translated "captain of the guard" literally means "chief of the butchers" (Hamilton, 2:458). The noun Moses uses (translated "guard") is derived from the Hebrew verb which means "to slaughter, butcher" (Ross, p. 632).

prosperity (verses 2-3; cf. Genesis 26:3, 24, 28-29, 28:14-15, and 39:23). Consequently, Potiphar promotes Joseph to the position of steward<sup>480</sup> (verses 4-6a<sup>481</sup>). Joseph had a “Midas touch” (Charles Swindoll, *Joseph: From Pit to Pinnacle*, p. 13); seemingly, everything he touched turned to gold (verses 2-5). Consequently, God prospered Potiphar on Joseph’s account (verse 5; cf. Genesis 12:3’s “I will bless them that bless thee”; cf. God’s prospering of Laban on Jacob’s account in Genesis 30:27 and 30).

### **39:6b-10**

Previously, Moses has accentuated the attractiveness of several of the matriarchs (Sarai in 12:11 and 14; Rebekah in 24:16 and 26:7; and Rachel in 29:17). In verse 6b, he accentuates the attractiveness of one of the patriarchs, the son of Rachel (cf. the description of David in 1 Samuel 16:12). Joseph was “a goodly person, and well favoured” (verse 6; NASB: “handsome in form and appearance”; NIV: “well-built and handsome”; Hamilton, 2:457: “handsome in figure and handsome in features”). Joseph’s attractiveness attracts Potiphar’s wife to him, so much so that she propositions him (verse 7). Joseph refuses her proposal, giving several reasons why (verses 8-9). For one, Joseph has an obligation to Potiphar that must not be violated (verses 8-9a). Most importantly, however, Joseph has an obligation to God that must not be violated (verse 9b<sup>482</sup>). Notice how Joseph calls adultery what it really is, a “great wickedness” (cf. 20:9). Notice also how Joseph views this sin as ultimately “against God” (cf. footnote 252), as opposed to “against Potiphar.” Potiphar’s wife persists. Joseph resists (verse 10). Notice how Joseph not only refuses to have physical relations with Potiphar’s wife, but also refuses to be around her (NIV: “or even be with her”). He “wisely set a defensive boundary” (Mathews, 2:735). “He never let his hand get near the cookie jar” (Hughes, p. 464). A good lesson here: Remove yourself from the source of temptation.

### **39:11-18**

In spite of his determination to avoid being around Potiphar’s wife, Joseph one day finds himself alone in the house with her (at her instigation?) (verse 11). Another good lesson here, men: Avoid being alone in a private place with another woman. Potiphar’s wife takes advantage of the opportunity and pounces (Hughes, p. 464, calls this an ambush). Whereas before Joseph reasoned (verses 8-9), this time he ran (verse 12; cf. 1 Corinthians 6:18 and 2 Timothy 2:22). How refreshing to see a patriarch acting with integrity when the heat is on! Joseph’s moral integrity stands in stark contrast to the

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<sup>480</sup> Or, as Davis (p. 270) puts it, comptroller.

<sup>481</sup> Commenting on “save the bread which he did eat” in verse 6, Hamilton (2:461) states: “The only thing Potiphar does not delegate to Joseph is the preparation of his food, perhaps because of a general Egyptian concern that non-Egyptians were unaware of how properly to prepare food (see 43:32), or more likely, because of ritual separation at mealtimes.”

<sup>482</sup> Concerning Joseph’s words, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Mathews (2:739) rightly responds: “There are few nobler lines in the Bible.”

immorality of his brothers, Reuben (in 35:22) and Judah (in 38:16). Joseph did not give the flame of fornication a chance to burn him (Proverbs 6:27-28); his reaction was instinctive. It is not unreasonable to assume that he had determined ahead of time what his immediate reaction would be if confronted by such a scenario. Joseph apparently was just going about his normal, daily routine when Potiphar's wife struck. More good lessons here, men: Always be on guard and determine your escape route ahead of time.<sup>483</sup>

William Congreve is renowned for saying: "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." Potiphar's wife is a case in point. She unleashes her fury on Joseph, falsely accusing (yet another instance of deception in the book of Genesis) him of attempted rape. Potiphar's wife first makes her accusation to the other male servants (verses 14<sup>484</sup>-15), then to her husband (verses 17-18). Notice how, when making her accusation to the other male servants, Potiphar's wife calls Joseph a "Hebrew" (verse 14), but when making it to her husband, she calls him the "Hebrew servant" (verse 17; cf. 39:19), thereby "putting Joseph in as despicable a light as possible" in the eyes of Potiphar (Hamilton, 2:469). Notice also how she pins part of the blame on her husband ("which thou hast brought unto us," verse 17; cf. 39:14 and 19). Calvin (2:300) assigns a sinister motive to her charge: "... [S]he involves her husband in the accusation, that she may compel him, by a sense of shame, to punish the guiltless. 'It is by thy fault, (she says,) that this stranger has been mocking me.' What other course does she leave open to her husband, than that he should hasten, with closed eyes, to avenge her, for the sake of purging himself from this charge?"

### **39:19-23**

Potiphar's wife, herself inflamed with lust, sets her husband aflame with anger<sup>485</sup> (verse 19). Consequently, Potiphar imprisons<sup>486</sup> Joseph (verse 20). The fact that Potiphar incarcerates Joseph, instead of executing him, is, according to several interpreters, an indication that Potiphar had doubts about his wife's story.<sup>487</sup> Along this line, Hughes (p.

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<sup>483</sup> "In the moment of temptation there is no time to fortify oneself with commitment to God's plan" (Ross, p. 628).

<sup>484</sup> Commenting on verse 14, Ross (p. 627) states: "Her words to the men of her household betray her disloyalty and bitterness toward her husband." In this regard, see also her words in verse 17.

<sup>485</sup> The Hebrew words translated "his wrath was kindled" in verse 19 literally mean "and his nose burned/turned red" (Hamilton, 2:469).

<sup>486</sup> According to Hamilton (2:475), Joseph's imprisonment is house arrest. However, Genesis 40:15 ("dungeon") and Psalm 105:18 ("Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron") implies much worse.

<sup>487</sup> Swindoll (p. 15) states: "At first glance, Potiphar's reaction to his wife's story seems to indicate that he believed her. But when you read of Joseph's punishment, it suggests that his

465) asks: “We are left to wonder, at whom was Potiphar’s anger [in verse 19] really directed?”<sup>488</sup>

Though things were looking down for Joseph, God was still with him (verses 21 and 23; cf. 39:2-3), showing him “mercy” (cf. comments on same word in 24:12) and giving him favor (cf. 1 Peter 2:20b) in the sight of the warden (verse 21). Consequently, the warden makes Joseph his steward (verses 22-23; cf. 39:4-6).<sup>489</sup> Thus, Joseph doesn’t stay down for long (you can’t keep a godly man down). Even from the depths of a “dungeon” (40:15), things are looking up for Joseph again.<sup>490</sup> “At the lowest point in his life, in the bonds of a foreign place, with no friend and no prospect of release, God initiated the steps that brought about deliverance for Joseph, his kin, and the world” (Mathews, 2:737).

### **40:1-8**

The fortieth chapter of Genesis opens with Joseph being joined in jail by two of Pharaoh’s servants, his chief cupbearer<sup>491</sup> and his chief baker, both guilty of the crime of offending Pharaoh (verse 1).<sup>492</sup> The prison was a room attached to Potiphar’s house (Hamilton, 2:476) (verse 3). Joseph was apparently in the good graces of Potiphar again, as Potiphar gives Joseph the responsibility of being in charge of the two new inmates (verse 4).

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Egyptian master wasn’t completely convinced. The normal sentence for a slave guilty of attempted rape was instant death. But Pharaoh’s chief executioner kept his sword sheathed and put Joseph in prison instead.” Hamilton (2:471) likewise states: “One would think, however, that if Potiphar is certain that Joseph tried to rape his wife in his absence, then he would immediately order Joseph’s execution. Perhaps Potiphar’s decree that Joseph be incarcerated, not executed, is a sign that he is not totally convinced about the authenticity of his wife’s story.”

<sup>488</sup> Walton (p. 671) answers Hughes’ question: “Given his wife’s slander of his own motives, the proven trustworthiness of Joseph, the fact that he is going to lose the services of a competent slave, and his knowledge of his wife’s character or lack of it, [Potiphar’s] anger arguably burns at his wife, not at Joseph.”

<sup>489</sup> “It seems God was preparing Joseph for his future governmental career no matter where he resided” (Davis, p. 271).

<sup>490</sup> “The first experience at the hands of his brothers must now have been of some comfort to him—he knew he had been here before. If God could raise him then, he could also do so now” (Ross, p. 627).

<sup>491</sup> The role of the cupbearer was to sample any food or drink prior to Pharaoh receiving it in order to insure it wasn’t poisoned.

<sup>492</sup> What was their crime? Did a poorly-prepared pastry made by the baker and displeasing to Pharaoh’s palate get past the cupbearer? We can only speculate. Whatever it was, Pharaoh was “wroth” (verse 2) enough about it to imprison both men and eventually execute the baker.

One night, both the cupbearer and the baker have a dream (verse 5). Because (they thought) there was no one capable of deciphering their dreams (verse 8a), both men were dejected (verse 6).<sup>493</sup> Joseph, clearly seeing their faces forlorn (verse 7), finds out why and asks the men to relate their dreams to him, confident that God will reveal to him the interpretation of each (verse 8).

### **40:9-15**

The cupbearer is the first to take Joseph up on his offer. In his dream, the cupbearer saw a grapevine with three branches. The vine produced grapes, from which the cupbearer made grape juice, which he gave to Pharaoh (verses 9-11). Joseph interprets the cupbearer's dream to mean that in three days Pharaoh would restore the cupbearer to his former position (verses 12-13<sup>494</sup>). Confident that this would indeed be the case (notice the "when" in verse 14), Joseph asks the cupbearer to spring him from prison by remembering his plight and bringing it to Pharaoh's attention (verses 14-15). Interestingly, the Hebrew word translated "dungeon" in verse 15 is the same word translated "pit" in 37:20, 22, 24, 28, and 29. Joseph goes from one "pit" (the cistern in Dothan) to another (the prison in Egypt).

### **40:16-19**

Emboldened by the favorable interpretation Joseph gives to the cupbearer's dream, the baker eagerly relates the details of his dream to Joseph. Unlike the cupbearer's dream, however, the baker's dream would prove to be a nightmare. In his dream, the baker saw three baskets of white bread on top of his head and birds eating the food out of the top basket (verses 16-17). Joseph interprets the baker's dream to mean that in three days Pharaoh would take his life<sup>495</sup> and the birds would eat his corpse (verses 18-19). Whereas Pharaoh would lift up (verse 13) the head of the cupbearer, he would lift off (verse 19) the head of the baker.

### **40:20-23**

Three days later, Pharaoh throws a birthday party for himself, at which he does to the cupbearer and the baker just as Joseph had said (verses 20-22). Contrary to expectations (Joseph's and the reader's), rather than keeping Joseph in mind, as Joseph had requested ("think on me" in verse 14, which is literally "remember me"), the

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<sup>493</sup> "A dream without an accompanying interpretation is like a diagnosis without a prognosis" (Hamilton, 2:476). Dreams were considered significant in ancient Egypt (Davis, p. 273). In fact, Egypt had professional dream interpreters (Hamilton, 2:476). The cupbearer and the baker, being Egyptians, thus viewed their dreams as significant and were, consequently, despondent over the prospect that they might not get to be interpreted.

<sup>494</sup> The expression "lift up thine head" (cf. Psalm 3:3) in verse 13 signifies restoration of favor (cf. 2 Kings 25:27//Jeremiah 52:31).

<sup>495</sup> There is some question as to what form the execution of the baker took. Hamilton (2:483) believes it was impalement. Another possibility is hanging (cf. Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Ross (p. 632) believes the baker was executed (means unspecified), then his body hung on a stake.

cupbearer “did not ... remember Joseph, but forgot him” (verse 23). It is highly unlikely that the cupbearer could so quickly forget (in the sense of loss of memory) such a vivid memory as Joseph interpreting his dream. More likely, his forgetfulness is willful (one may contrast the cupbearer’s forgetting in 40:23 with God’s remembering in 8:1, 19:29, and 30:22; for the significance of remembering in these passages, see comments on 8:1). Accordingly, Hamilton (2:482) translates: “The chief cupbearer ignored Joseph.” See especially Isaiah 49:14 in this regard. The cupbearer’s “amnesia” lasted for two years (41:1a). In His perfect time, God would take Joseph from the pit of the prison to the pinnacle of the palace. Though the cupbearer forgot, God had not.

## Lesson 22: Genesis 41-42

In Genesis 41-42, the Joseph narrative (37:2-50:26) continues. As in chapter 37 (the dreams of Joseph) and chapter 40 (the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker), so in chapter 41 a pair of dreams play a significant role in the unfolding of the drama which is the life of Joseph. Two years after the events of 40:5-23 (verse 1), Pharaoh has two separate, but interrelated, dreams (cf. Joseph's two separate, but interrelated, dreams in chapter 37). In the first dream, he sees seven healthy cows emerge from the Nile River, followed by seven emaciated cows that eat the healthy ones (verses 1-4). In the second dream, he sees seven healthy ears of grain sprout from one stalk, followed by seven thin, wind-scorched ears from the same stalk that eat the healthy ones (verses 5-7). Troubled by these dreams, Pharaoh summons his professional dream interpreters, who fail to interpret his dreams (verse 8). These developments jog the memory of Pharaoh's chief cupbearer, who tells Pharaoh about Joseph and his ability to interpret dreams (verses 9-13). Joseph is quickly taken from prison to the palace to appear before Pharaoh (verse 14). Pharaoh tells Joseph his dreams (verses 17-24), and Joseph interprets them (verses 25-32): The seven healthy cows and the seven healthy ears of grain represent seven years of agricultural abundance, while the seven emaciated cows and the seven thin, wind-scorched ears of grain represent seven years of famine that will follow, with the seven years of famine being so severe that the seven years of plenty will seem as if they never happened (verses 30-31; cf. verse 21). Not only does Joseph interpret Pharaoh's dreams, but he also recommends a course of action Pharaoh should take in order to ensure the survival of his subjects (verses 33-36). Pharaoh is so impressed by Joseph's proposal that he gives Joseph the authority to carry it out, making him Egypt's prime minister (verses 37-44). Not only does Pharaoh give Joseph a powerful position in the Egyptian government, but also an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife (verse 45). The seven years of fruitfulness begin and Joseph enacts his plan (verses 46b-49). During this time, Joseph's wife bears him two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (verses 50-52). After the seven years of fruitfulness end, the seven years of famine begin, affecting not only the land of Egypt, but also the entire region (the inhabited world at that time). Consequently, not only the people of Egypt, but also the people of the world, look to one man, Joseph for their survival (verses 53-57).

Among the people of the world who flee to Joseph for food are Joseph's own family back in Canaan. Chapter 42 begins with Jacob receiving word that food is available for purchase in Egypt (verses 1-2). Jacob sends his sons (minus Benjamin and, of course, Joseph) to Egypt to buy some grain (verses 3-5). When Joseph's brothers appear before Joseph, they bow to him (verse 6), a fulfillment of Joseph's dreams in chapter 37. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him (verses 7-8). Joseph repeatedly accuses his brothers of being spies, a charge they repeatedly deny (verses 9-14). Joseph puts their truthfulness to the test (verses 15-16) by demanding they bring Benjamin to him (verse 15; cf. verse 13). At first, Joseph stipulates that one of the ten retrieve Benjamin while the rest remain confined in Egypt (verse 16). However, after confining all ten in prison for three days (verse 17), Joseph has a change of heart and stipulates that nine return to retrieve Benjamin and only one remain

confined in Egypt (verses 18-20). Consequently, Simeon is confined (verse 24b) and the rest return to Canaan to retrieve Benjamin (verse 26). After arriving in Canaan, the nine brothers tell their father, Jacob about their experience in Egypt (verses 29-34). Jacob reacts unfavorably (verse 36). Reuben offers the lives of his two sons as security for the safe return of Benjamin (verse 37), but Jacob refuses the offer (verse 38).

### **41:1-8**

Though Pharaoh's cupbearer had forgotten Joseph, God had not (cf. Isaiah 49:14-15). In chapter 41, God brings Joseph's thirteen years (compare 37:2 with 41:46) in the crucible of affliction to an end, and Joseph comes forth as gold (Job 23:10). In a matter of one day, Joseph goes from prison to dominion (Ross, p. 630), from prisoner to prime minister (Swindoll, p. 38; Hamilton, 2:501), from the pit of prison to the pinnacle of the palace. Having already waited eleven years for the fulfillment of his dreams (in chapter 37) to come to pass, Joseph has to wait two more agonizing years (verse 1).

In accordance with God's perfect timetable, Pharaoh has two dreams that trouble him (verse 8; cf. Daniel 2:1). In the first dream, seven healthy cows are consumed by seven unhealthy ones (verses 1-4). In the second dream, seven healthy ears of grain are consumed by seven unhealthy ones (verses 5-7). Pharaoh has a group of professional dream interpreters (Davis, p. 275) called "magicians" and "wise men" (cf. Exodus 7:11, Daniel 1:20, and 2:2), whom he summons to interpret his dreams (verse 8a; cf. Daniel 2:2). These men, however, fail to do so (verse 8b; cf. Daniel 2:3-11).

### **41:9-16**

The failure of Pharaoh's finest to decipher his dreams prompts Pharaoh's cupbearer to finally remember<sup>496</sup> Joseph, whom he mentions to Pharaoh (verses 9<sup>497</sup>-13). Consequently, Joseph is summoned (verse 14). The timing of the cupbearer's remembrance is highly providential (God in His providence puts the right people in the right place at the right time for the right purpose). As Ross (p. 636) states: "Had the prisoners mentioned Joseph earlier, the ruler might have ignored them; at this time, however, the ruler was dependent upon Joseph." Sailhamer (p. 240) likewise states: "As it turns out, even the cup-bearer's forgetfulness worked in Joseph's favor since, just at the opportune moment, he remembered Joseph and recounted his wisdom before the

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<sup>496</sup> Significantly, the Hebrew verb translated "remember" in 41:9 is the same one found twice in 40:14 (translated "think on" and "make mention"). Regarding the cupbearer's remembrance at this point, Hamilton (2:490) comments: "It is difficult to know ... whether the cupbearer deliberately forgot Joseph and now seizes on an opportune moment to remember him (and thus ingratiate himself further with the pharaoh), or whether he actually did forget about Joseph until this particular scene jogged his memory." Personally, I'm inclined to believe the former (cf. comments on 40:23).

<sup>497</sup> In verse 9, the cupbearer speaks of his "faults" (plural). Hamilton (2:490) suggests that the particular faults he has in mind are his offense against Pharaoh (40:1) and his offense against Joseph in failing to tell Pharaoh about him sooner.



king.”<sup>498</sup> Notice how Joseph resists the temptation to glory in his ability, instead giving God the glory (verses 15-16; cf. Genesis 40:8, 41:25, 28, Daniel 2:19-23, and 27-30), a pattern we would do well to follow (see 1 Corinthians 4:7 and 1 Peter 4:10-11).<sup>499</sup>

### **41:17-36**

Pharaoh tells Joseph his dreams (verses 17-24). In these verses, the reader learns one more significant detail not related by Moses earlier (in verses 1-4), namely, that after the seven unhealthy cows eat the seven healthy ones, the former are just as “ill favoured” (verses 19 and 21; NIV: “scrawny”) as before. Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dreams (verses 25-32). He starts by informing Pharaoh that his dreams are interrelated (verse 25a; cf. verse 26b) and that they are a means of special revelation (see comments on 37:5-11) (verse 25b; cf. verse 28). The seven healthy cows and the seven healthy ears of grain represent seven years of fruitfulness (verses 26a and 29). These seven years would be followed by seven years of famine, represented by the seven unhealthy cows and the seven unhealthy ears of grain (verse 27). The severity of the second would be much greater than the fruitfulness of the first (verses 30-31), as signified by the unchanged appearance of the unhealthy cows after eating the healthy ones (verse 21). Joseph concludes his interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams by interpreting the significance of their number. The fact that God caused Pharaoh to dream two separate, but

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<sup>498</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> century preacher, John Chrysostom (cited in Mathews, 2:744) also makes this point: “As it was, however, the wise and creative Lord, who like a fine craftsman knew how long the gold should be kept in the fire and when it ought to be taken out, allowed forgetfulness to affect the chief cupbearer for a period of two years so that the moment of Pharaoh’s dreams should arrive and that by force of circumstances the good man should become known to the whole of Pharaoh’s kingdom.”

<sup>499</sup> Hughes (pp. 479-480) points out how God-centered Joseph’s responses to Pharaoh were: “... [Joseph] told Pharaoh (who himself was considered to be a god incarnate) that God (*ha Elohim*, ‘the God’) would explain his dream. Thus, to Pharaoh’s face Joseph asserted that his God was superior to and sovereign over the gods of Egypt” and “Now as Joseph proceeded to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams, the interpretation was wholly God-centered. Remember that Joseph had already ... declared that God is the source of interpretations ... to Pharaoh with his initial word, ‘God [*Elohim*, “the God”] will give Pharaoh a favorable answer’ (v. 16). ... Joseph’s interpretation in verses 25-32 invoked God at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the interpretation. The opening line was unequivocally God-centered: ‘Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God [*ha Elohim*] has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do”’ (v. 25). The middle duplicates the God-centeredness: ‘It is as I told Pharaoh; God [*ha Elohim*, “the God”] has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do’ (v. 28). And the final sentence ... named God twice: ‘And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God [*ha Elohim*] will shortly bring it about’ (v. 32). The interpretation that Joseph gave here announced to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt that the one true God controlled their existence.”

interrelated, dreams signified that what God was telling Pharaoh through the dreams would certainly and soon come to pass (verse 32).<sup>500</sup>

Without skipping a beat, Joseph counsels Pharaoh to live in light of the revelation he has just received from God. Specifically, Joseph suggests that Pharaoh select a man “discreet and wise<sup>501</sup>” (verse 33) to manage the coming crisis, as well as several men to work under him (verse 34a). Furthermore, Joseph suggests that one-fifth of the yield<sup>502</sup> during the seven years of plenty be stored away for the seven years of famine (verses 34b-36; cf. Proverbs 6:6-11).<sup>503</sup>

### **41:37-49**

Needless to say, Pharaoh was impressed, not only by Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams, but also by his wise counsel (verses 37-39).<sup>504</sup> As a result, Pharaoh promotes Joseph to the position of prime minister (verses 40<sup>505</sup>-44<sup>506</sup>; cf. the similar promotion of

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<sup>500</sup> The same significance may be ascribed to Joseph’s two separate, but interrelated, dreams in chapter 37 (see footnote 451).

<sup>501</sup> “By using [the Hebrew word translated “wise” in v. 33], however, the narrator [Moses] may be implying a bit of sarcasm. Pharaoh has already consulted with the best of Egypt’s [“wise men,” v. 8], and they failed him miserably. Let the pharaoh not make the same mistake twice!” (Hamilton, 2:499).

<sup>502</sup> Hamilton (2:498) suggests that verse 34 read: “Let him divide into five districts the land.”

<sup>503</sup> In other words, saving for a rainy day, although in this case (assuming the famine would be caused by a crop failure brought about by drought, rather than by pestilence or an infestation of insects) it would be saving for a day without rain.

<sup>504</sup> Pharaoh recognizes a divine presence in Joseph (“a man in whom the Spirit of God is,” verse 38; cf. Daniel 5:14) and attributes his interpretation to a divine source (“God hath shewed thee all this,” verse 39). Of whom is Pharaoh thinking, the God of Israel or an Egyptian god? While most translations opt for the first, the NEB (“the spirit of a god,” verse 38; “a god has made all this known to you,” verse 39) opts for the second. A possible support for the second option is the fact that when Pharaoh uses the divine name in verses 38 and 39, he does so without the definite article, whereas when Joseph does so (in verses 25, 28, and 32), he does so with the definite article (literally “the God”); however, Joseph does not use the definite article back in verse 16. Even if Pharaoh is speaking of the God of Israel, one cannot necessarily surmise from this that he has become a believer at this point.

<sup>505</sup> Commenting on the Hebrew word translated “house” in verse 40, Hamilton (2:503) states: “This is the third ‘house’ in which Joseph has been placed. He has gone from Potiphar’s house, to the jailhouse, to Pharaoh’s house.” In each of these “houses,” Joseph is made a steward. A steward is one who is given the responsibility to manage a household owned by another. Because Joseph was faithful in his previous stewardships, he was given a far greater stewardship (see Matthew 25:21, 23, and Luke 16:10).

Daniel under similar circumstances in Daniel 2:48<sup>507</sup>). Accordingly, Pharaoh gives Joseph several accessories, such as his signet ring<sup>508</sup>, royal clothing, a gold necklace, and a chariot<sup>509</sup> (verses 42-43a). In addition to these, Pharaoh gives Joseph an Egyptian name, Zaphnath-paaneah<sup>510</sup> and an Egyptian wife (verse 45), Asenath<sup>511</sup>, the daughter of Potipherah,<sup>512</sup> priest of On<sup>513</sup>. The failure of Joseph<sup>514</sup> or Moses to object to Joseph's marriage to the daughter of a pagan priest (cf. Moses' marriage to the daughter of a pagan priest in Exodus 2:16-21) should not be viewed as a divine sanction of the union. The seven years of plenty begin, and Joseph begins saving the excess grain (verses 46-49).

### **41:50-57**

Joseph fathers two sons by Asenath, Manasseh and Ephraim (verses 50-52). Along with ten of Joseph's brothers (Levi excepted), these two sons of Joseph would comprise the twelve tribes of Israel. Manasseh means "one who causes to forget" (Hamilton, 2:512), derived from the Hebrew verb *nashah*, meaning "to forget" (Swindoll, p. 41). According to Swindoll (p. 41), "in the Hebrew construction of this word, Manasseh

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<sup>506</sup> According to Hamilton (2:507), the Hebrew expression translated "lift up his hand or foot" in verse 44 signifies "lay claim to property."

<sup>507</sup> There are many similarities between Joseph at this point in his life and Daniel at a similar point in his life: a powerful king dreams a troubling dream (Pharaoh; Nebuchadnezzar); the king's men cannot interpret his dream; a Hebrew foreigner interprets the dream (Joseph; Daniel); as a result, the Hebrew foreigner is promoted to the position of prime minister.

<sup>508</sup> "The term *signet ring* comes from the Hebrew verb that means 'to sink down.' The ring was used for sinking the Pharaoh's emblem into soft clay. It was like the MasterCard of that day, with all the wealth of Egypt behind it" (Swindoll, p. 39).

<sup>509</sup> What Swindoll (p. 39) refers to as a "company car." Walton (*Genesis*, p. 676) calls chariots the limousines of the day and those who "cried before" Joseph (verse 43) "the equivalent of the Secret Service protection that is offered to important dignitaries and officers in the United States."

<sup>510</sup> Zaphnath-paaneah means "God speaks and lives" (Ross, p. 643)"the god speaks and lives" (Swindoll, p. 39). The "god" is most likely Neith (the "nath" in Zaphnath), an Egyptian goddess (Swindoll, p. 39).

<sup>511</sup> Asenath means "she belongs to Neith" (Davis, p. 277; on Neith, see previous footnote).

<sup>512</sup> Potipherah means "he whom Ra has given" (Davis, p. 277), Ra being the Egyptian sun god.

<sup>513</sup> On was an Egyptian city seven miles northeast of Cairo (Hamilton, 2:508).

<sup>514</sup> "... Joseph does not object to any of these procedures, but then he is hardly in a position to do so" (Hamilton, 2:507).

means ‘to take the sting out of a memory.’” Joseph so names his firstborn because his birth made Joseph forget all his suffering in his father’s home (verse 51).<sup>515</sup> The name of Joseph’s second son is also etymologically significant. Ephraim means “fruitfulness” (verse 52), derived from the Hebrew verb *para*, meaning “to bear fruit” (Ross, p. 644). Thus, not only did God make Joseph forgetful, but also fruitful (Ross, p. 639). The names Joseph gives to his sons erase any concern that his political fame and/or Egyptian dame were starting to make him spiritually lame.<sup>516</sup> The seven years of famine begin, and Joseph begins to sell the excess grain to his fellow Egyptians and to people from all over the world, who came to Egypt to buy the grain Joseph had stored in the Egyptian granaries (verses 53-57).

### **42:1-5**

Among those from other countries who come to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph is Joseph’s own family. Sailhamer (p. 244) nicely ties chapters 41 and 42 together: “The preceding chapter [chp. 41] has recorded Joseph’s rise to power. The present chapter [chp. 42] turns to the divine purpose behind his miraculous rise.” Jacob once again (as he did with Joseph in chapter 37) favors a son of Rachel over his other sons, sending all the other sons to Egypt to buy grain, but holding Benjamin back, fearing that harm would befall him (verse 4; cf. 42:38).<sup>517</sup> It is hard to miss the irony in verse 5, as Joseph’s brothers join a caravan travelling from Canaan to Egypt (cf. the Canaan-to-Egypt caravan Joseph’s brothers made Joseph a part of in chapter 37). Thus, Joseph’s brothers get to follow in their brother’s footsteps. One cannot help but wonder if and how often, while on this journey, Joseph’s brothers were haunted by the thought that they had sent Joseph on the same journey some two decades earlier.

### **42:6-17**

In 37:5-11, Joseph dreamed that his brothers would one day bow before him. Some 20+ years later, his dreams come true (verse 6). While Joseph immediately recognizes his brothers, they do not recognize him (verses 7-8).<sup>518</sup> Recalling his dreams, Joseph

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<sup>515</sup> According to Hamilton (2:512), verse 51’s “all my toil, and all my father’s house” is a hendiadys. Hendiadys literally means “one through two.” A hendiadys is a literary device whereby one idea is expressed through two words joined by an “and.” Examples include “good and ready,” “nice and warm,” etc.

<sup>516</sup> “... Joseph used Hebrew names for his children that signified his faith in the Lord was as strong as ever ....” (Ross, p. 645).

<sup>517</sup> Hamilton (2:516) writes in this regard: “He [Jacob] is less concerned that the ten sons’ lives will be in danger than he is that Benjamin’s would. Thus they seem expendable, but nothing must ever happen to Benjamin.”

<sup>518</sup> Why couldn’t Joseph’s brothers recognize him? For one, he disguised his voice by speaking to them in a harsh tone (verse 7). Other factors may include: 1) the fact that over 20 years had passed since they last saw each other (Joseph 17 years old in 37:2; Joseph 30 years old in 41:46; 7 years of plenty come and go in 41:53; 7 years of famine underway in 41:54); 2) the fact that he

accuses his brothers of being spies (verse 9).<sup>519</sup> Joseph's brothers deny the charge, claiming to be "true men" (verse 11), a laughable claim in light of their actions in 37:31-35. Joseph persists in his charge (verse 12), causing his brothers to reveal more information about themselves (verse 13). Joseph puts his brothers to the test, stipulating that they prove the truthfulness of their words by having one of their number retrieve Benjamin and bring him to Egypt (verses 14-16). Before allowing one of them to do so, however, Joseph incarcerates all of them for three days (verse 17), perhaps his way of giving them a taste of their own medicine (compare their "imprisonment" of Joseph in the "pit" in chapter 37; cf. comments on 40:15).

### **42:18-28**

During the three days Joseph's brothers are imprisoned, Joseph has a change of heart, which he attributes to his fear of God (verse 18).<sup>520</sup> Consequently, Joseph allows all his brothers, save one<sup>521</sup>, to return to Canaan to retrieve Benjamin (verses 19-20).<sup>522</sup> The

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was clean shaven (see 41:14), which Egyptian men were accustomed to be, while Jewish men were not (according to Mathews, 2:758, this shaving included not only Joseph's facial hair, but also his head, in keeping with Egyptian custom); 3) the fact that he spoke in an Egyptian tongue (see 42:23); 4) the likelihood that he was referred to by his Egyptian name (see 41:45); 5) the fact that he was in the position he was in (a position in which his brothers would never expect or suspect him to be); and 6) the fact that his brothers didn't believe he was even alive anymore (see 42:13 and 44:20).

<sup>519</sup> F. B. Meyer (quoted in Swindoll, p. 51) speculates at this point: "I believe *he repeated exactly the scene at the pit's mouth* [emphasis his]; and indeed we may perhaps see what really happened there [twenty years before], reflected in the mirror of this scene. It is not unlikely that when they saw him coming towards them, in his princelike dress, they had rushed at him, accusing him of having to come to spy out their corrupt behaviour, and take back an evil report to their father, as he had done before: if so, this will explain why he now suddenly accused them of being spies. No doubt the lad protested that he was no spy—that he had only come to inquire after their welfare; but they had met his protestations with rude violence in much the same way as the rough-speaking governor now treated them .... If this were the case—and it seems most credible—it is obvious that it was a powerful appeal to their conscience and memory, and one that could not fail to awaken both."

<sup>520</sup> Because Joseph fears God, he refrains from using his superiority to take advantage of his brothers' vulnerability, unlike his brothers, who (in chapter 37) did not hesitate to use their superiority to take advantage of Joseph's vulnerability, thus showing that they, unlike Joseph, did not truly fear God.

<sup>521</sup> Just as the actions of Joseph's brothers in chapter 37 separated one brother (Joseph) from the rest, so Joseph's actions in chapter 42 separate one brother (Simeon) from the rest. This may be Joseph's subtle way of reminding his brothers of what they did to him, giving them (especially Simeon) a taste of what it felt like to be separated from one's brother(s). Many also suggest that this is Joseph's way of putting his brothers to the test to see if they have changed their ways. As Mathews (2:780) suggests, Joseph's actions "placed the brothers in the similar spot that they had

old adage, “what goes around comes around” proves true in the case of Joseph’s brothers. The distress they inflicted upon Joseph comes around to them (verse 21). Unknown to his brothers, Joseph understands every word they say in verses 21<sup>523</sup> and 22 (verse 23). Consequently, Joseph weeps (verse 24a). After regaining his composure, Joseph decides that Simeon will be the one who will stay behind and remain confined<sup>524</sup> until Benjamin is brought to Egypt (verse 24b). Joseph, a truly magnanimous man, secretly returns the money his brothers paid for the grain they purchased from him<sup>525</sup> (verse 25), the discovery of which causes his family considerable consternation (verses 27-28; cf. 42:35).

### **42:29-38**

Joseph’s brothers arrive back home and tell their father all about their trip to Egypt (verses 29-34), after which they discover that all their money has been refunded (verse 35; cf. 42:27-28).<sup>526</sup> Jacob isn’t exactly thrilled about what has transpired (verse 36). Seeing that Jacob still (cf. 42:4) refuses to let Benjamin out of his sight, Reuben guarantees Benjamin’s safe return, offering the lives of his two sons as security (verse 37), a move that several rightly question.<sup>527</sup> Reuben’s offer notwithstanding, Jacob reiterates his refusal to part with Benjamin, claiming that the loss of Benjamin would be the death of him (verse 38), showing once again (cf. comments on 42:4) his favoritism.<sup>528</sup>

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faced with young Joseph. Once they had the food for which they came, they could return and lie again to their father, leaving their brother to languish in prison.”

<sup>522</sup> Hamilton (2:526) offers the following reasons as to why Joseph changed his mind in this regard: “First, nine voices might have a better chance of persuading Jacob to release Benjamin. Second, how could one son carry enough grain back to Canaan’s ‘hungry households’? Joseph is genuinely concerned that a sufficient portion of grain provisions be transported to the needy in Canaan; such is his concern for his family’s well-being. Third, Joseph must have reflected on the possibility that the nonreturn of nine of his sons could prove fatal to Jacob; such is the measure of his concern for the well-being of his father.”

<sup>523</sup> According to H. C. Leupold (cited in Swindoll, p. 52), verse 21 is the only acknowledgment of sin in the book of Genesis.

<sup>524</sup> Why does Joseph choose Simeon, the second oldest rather than Reuben, the oldest? Is it because he learns for the first time of Reuben’s intercession for him (verse 22; cf. 37:21-22 and 29-30)?

<sup>525</sup> Hughes (p. 497) suggests that this is yet another test Joseph gives his brothers: “With this, Joseph further tested his brothers by placing money in their sacks. Would they be happy to abandon Simeon for money, as they had once done to Joseph?”

<sup>526</sup> Several have pointed out that this is the second time the brothers have returned home with money, but without a brother (cf. chapter 37).

<sup>527</sup> Hamilton (2:536) and Ross (p. 654) call Reuben’s move “foolish”; Davis (p. 280) calls it “rash.”

<sup>528</sup> Commenting on Jacob’s words in verse 38, Hamilton (2:536) rightly asks: “Is this a backhanded slap at the sons of Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah?”

## Lesson 23: Genesis 43-44

In Genesis 43-44, the Joseph narrative (37:2-50:26) continues. In chapter 43, the famine continues and, consequently, Joseph's family in Canaan uses up all the grain they purchased from Joseph in Egypt in chapter 42 (verses 1-2a). When Jacob tells his sons to return to Egypt to buy some more (verse 2b), Judah reminds Jacob that they cannot get more grain unless Benjamin accompanies them (verses 3-5). Jacob resists (verses 6-7). Judah insists (verses 8-10). Jacob says OK (verses 11-14). Joseph gets his way (verse 15; cf. 42:20). When Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt, Joseph invites them to a special dinner at his residence (verses 16-17). Misreading Joseph's motive, his brothers speak to Joseph's steward at the doorstep of Joseph's house, declaring their innocence over the surprise silver in their sacks (verses 18-22). The steward clears them of any wrongdoing in the matter (verse 23), then brings them into the house (verse 24). Joseph's brothers prepare for Joseph's arrival (verse 25). When Joseph arrives, his brothers present him with a present and once again (cf. 42:6) bow down to him (verse 26). After answering Joseph's question about their father's welfare (verses 27-28a), they bow down to Joseph again (verse 28b). After seeing his full brother, Benjamin for the first time in over twenty years (verse 29), Joseph cannot contain himself (verse 30). After regaining his composure, Joseph orders the meal to be served (verse 31), a meal marked by several oddities. First, there is segregated seating, per Egyptian custom (verse 32). Second, Joseph seats his brothers in the exact order of their birth, much to their astonishment (verse 33). Third, Joseph gives Benjamin five times more food than he does his brothers (verse 34).

In chapter 44, Joseph sends his brothers back to Canaan (verse 3), but not before he once again (cf. 42:25) secretly places their money back in their sacks (verse 1), as well as his special silver cup in Benjamin's sack (verse 2). Before his brothers get too far down the road, Joseph commands his steward to pursue them, overtake them, and charge them with the theft of his special silver cup (verses 4-6). Joseph's brothers plead innocent to the charge (verses 7-8). In fact, they are so convinced of their innocence that they suggest a severe penalty if found guilty: the possessor of the cup is to be killed and the rest enslaved (verse 9). Joseph's steward suggests a much more lenient sentence—the guilty will be enslaved, the rest set free (verse 10). Upon searching all eleven sacks, the steward finds the silver cup in the sack of Benjamin (verses 11-12). Despondent, all eleven brothers return to Joseph's house (verse 13). Once in Joseph's presence, they bow before him again (verse 14). Joseph formally charges them with the crime (verse 15). Judah, once again (cf. 43:3-5 and 8-11; notice also the words "Judah and his brethren" at the start of verse 14) speaking for the group, enters a guilty plea and recommends a penalty of enslavement for all eleven of them (verse 16). Joseph reiterates (cf. verse 10) that the penalty will be enslavement only for the one in whose possession the cup was found (verse 17). Judah approaches Joseph, seeking the release of Benjamin and offering himself in Benjamin's place (verses 18-34).

### **43:1-15**

The seven years of severe famine (verse 1) continue and, as a result, Jacob's family in Canaan once again runs out of grain (verse 2a). Jacob naively believes that his sons can return to Egypt to buy more grain without Benjamin going with them (verse 2b). Judah, however, reminds his father that, per the Egyptian prime minister's demand (which Judah paraphrases), they cannot (verses 3-5). Notice how Jacob continues (cf. 42:36 and 38) to think first and foremost about himself (verse 6).<sup>529</sup>

Like Reuben before him (in 42:37), Judah attempts to persuade his father to let Benjamin go (verses 8-10). Unlike Reuben (42:38), Judah is successful (verses 11-13). Judah puts the issue before his father forthrightly: either risk the life of Benjamin or be responsible for the death of the entire family, three generations worth (verse 8).<sup>530</sup> As a further incentive, Judah promises to take personal responsibility for Benjamin's welfare (verse 9; cf. Reuben's similar promise in 42:37).

Jacob relents, though somewhat reluctantly. Jacob instructs his sons to take not only Benjamin with them (verse 13), but also a gift<sup>531</sup> for "the man" (verse 11), the money that was returned to them the first time<sup>532</sup>, and money to buy more grain (verse 12). Jacob prays that "God Almighty" (El Shaddai; cf. 17:1 and 28:2) will be compassionate to his sons (verse 14a; cf. Jeremiah 42:12). Jacob's words in verse 14b ("if I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved") are reminiscent of Esther's in Esther 4:16 ("if I perish, I perish"). Having received their father's approval to take Benjamin with them, Joseph's brothers head to Egypt once again (verse 15<sup>533</sup>).

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<sup>529</sup> According to some, implicit in Jacob's question in verse 6 is a wish that his sons had been deceptive. Hamilton (2:541) states in this regard: "Even if asked, could they not have blurred the truth? Who better than Jacob knows how not to be completely honest?"

<sup>530</sup> If Jacob lets Benjamin go, he may or may not lose him. If he does not let Benjamin go, he will lose him for sure (due to the death of both by starvation). As Hamilton (2:541) asks: "Will [Jacob] consign his family to starvation, and lose Benjamin anyway? Or is he willing to release Benjamin and take his chances?"

<sup>531</sup> Interestingly, many of the products Jacob's sons would carry from Canaan to Egypt as a gift for Joseph were the same products transported by the Ishmaelite caravan that carried Joseph from Canaan to Egypt (compare 37:25 with 43:11), including some silver and a favored son of Jacob. Was this a further reminder to the brothers of what they had done to Joseph (cf. comments on 42:1-5)? Was the gift an improper attempt on Jacob's part to win Joseph's favor (similar to the gift he offered Esau in 32:13-21 and 33:8)? Most think not, among whom are Hamilton (2:544), who calls the gift "appropriate etiquette and protocol when visiting the headquarters of a foreign dignitary."

<sup>532</sup> "Jacob, formerly adept at taking something away from somebody by stealth, now insists that his sons keep nothing that is not legitimately theirs" (Hamilton, 2:545).



### **43:16-25**

As the father appeared to be looking for the return of his son in the story of the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:20), so it appears that Joseph was looking for the return of his brothers, especially Benjamin (verse 16). Also as in the story of the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:23), a special meal is prepared, with the main dish being a slain animal (verse 16). Joseph's brothers must have been perplexed by this (verses 16-17). During their previous visit (in chapter 42), Joseph had accused them of being spies, imprisoned all of them for three days, and detained Simeon. Now he's inviting them over to his place for a state dinner? Understandably, Joseph's brothers are suspicious, thinking Joseph is going to give 'em some flack over the silver in their sacks (verse 18; cf. 42:25, 27-28, and 35). Accordingly, as soon as Joseph's brothers meet Joseph's steward at the entrance of Joseph's house, they are quick to let the steward know they are innocent in the matter (verses 19-22). Joseph's steward clears them of any wrongdoing and then releases Simeon to them (verse 23). The steward invites Joseph's brothers into the house and gives them water for washing their feet and fodder for their donkeys to eat (verse 24).

### **43:26-34**

Joseph arrives, marking the first time Jacob's twelve sons have been together in over twenty years, and his brothers present him with their present and once again (cf. 42:6) bow down to him (verse 26; cf. verse 28). Contrary to what his brothers expected (43:18) and in stark contrast to his tone during their last visit (see 42:7, 9, 12, and 14-16), Joseph cordially converses with his brothers, asking them about their welfare<sup>534</sup> and the welfare of their father (verse 27). Seeing Benjamin, his full brother after so many years<sup>535</sup> is too much for Joseph (verses 29<sup>536</sup>-30). As Swindoll (p. 69) states: "The dam holding back Joseph's emotions cracks and quickly collapses." In 43:14, Jacob wished that God would grant his sons "mercy before the man." In verse 30,

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<sup>533</sup> Commenting on verse 15, Hamilton (2:548) states: "The postponement of *Benjamin* to the last of three accusatives accentuates the heart-wrenching agony of the release." W. L. Humphreys (quoted in Hamilton, 2:548) states in this regard: "The 'and Benjamin' hangs like the resigned sigh of a father trapped between the need to live and the possibility of a life made utterly empty through another loss."

<sup>534</sup> Back in 37:14, Joseph was commissioned by his father to check on the welfare of his brothers.

<sup>535</sup> We know that it was at least twenty years since Joseph last saw Benjamin (see footnote 518). How old was Benjamin when Joseph last saw him? It appears that Benjamin was at least six years younger than Joseph (Joseph born, 30:24; Joseph serves six years for Laban's flocks, 30:25-43 and 31:42; Benjamin born, 35:18). If so, Benjamin was no older than eleven when Joseph, then seventeen, last saw him.

<sup>536</sup> Commenting on Joseph's comment to Benjamin in verse 29, Hamilton (2:554) states: "This blessing must have raised some eyebrows among Benjamin's brothers. Why has 'the man' never said anything like that to any of them?"

Jacob gets his wish, as Joseph's "bowels did yearn" (literally, "his compassion boiled over"; Hamilton, 2:552).

After regaining his composure, Joseph returns and gives the order to begin the meal (verse 31). Because the Egyptians had an aversion to eating with Hebrews<sup>537</sup>, Joseph's brothers eat at a separate table (verse 32).<sup>538</sup> The order in which Joseph seats his brothers<sup>539</sup> is astonishing to them, for he seats them in the exact order of their birth (verse 33).<sup>540</sup> Another peculiar thing about the meal is the fact that Benjamin's portion is five times bigger (talk about "super sizing" your meal) than the portion each of his brothers is given (verse 34). According to Ross, Joseph is putting his brothers to the test: "If they retained any envy for this son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite of the lot, this treatment was bound to excite it. The test was calculated to give them the opportunity to rekindle the old animosity" (p. 661); "Joseph was deliberately favoring Benjamin over his brothers, providing them with reason for jealousy and preparing them for the opportunity to rid themselves of Benjamin as they had Joseph" (p. 656).

#### **44:1-13**

Before Joseph's brothers depart for home (presumably the next day), Joseph has his steward once again (as in 42:25) put their money back in their sacks (verse 1). Additionally, Joseph has his steward put Joseph's special silver cup in Benjamin's sack (verse 2).<sup>541</sup> After his brothers depart (verse 3), Joseph instructs his steward to chase them and charge them with the theft of his special silver cup (verses 4-6). Whether or

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<sup>537</sup> Why this aversion? According to Hamilton (2:553), the Targum Onqelos [an Aramaic paraphrase of the Pentateuch] said that the aversion was due to the fact that "the Hebrews eat the cattle that the Egyptians worship."

<sup>538</sup> "They will sell and share food with Hebrews, but will not share a table with Hebrews" (Hamilton, 2:555).

<sup>539</sup> Hamilton (2:553) renders the start of verse 33: "They were seated at his [Joseph's] direction."

<sup>540</sup> Henry Morris (cited in Swindoll, p. 69) comments: "After they were assigned to seats at their table, the eleven brothers noted a remarkable thing. They had been seated in order of age, from the eldest through the youngest. If this were a mere coincidence, it was indeed marvelous. One can easily show ... that there are no less than 39,917,000 [39,916,800 to be exact] different orders in which eleven individuals could have been seated! ... Evidently, this man knew a great deal more about their family than they had realized ...." Hamilton (2:555) adds: "Such a perfect seating plan would hardly be accidental."

<sup>541</sup> Swindoll (p. 75) refers to this as a silver in the sack trap. Did Benjamin drink from this very cup at the festive meal the day before? Why would Joseph set such a trap? According to Ross (p. 665), Joseph is testing his brothers' concern for Benjamin. In other words, will they stick by this son of Rachel, thus showing their character has changed, or will they repeat their sin of chapter 37?

not Joseph actually did so<sup>542</sup>, he claims that he used this special silver cup for divination (verse 5; cf. 44:15).<sup>543</sup>

Joseph's brothers categorically deny committing the crime with which Joseph's steward charges them (verse 7), using the argument that if they were so honest as to give back the silver they found in their sacks, then they certainly would not be so dishonest as to steal Joseph's silver cup (verse 8).<sup>544</sup> Joseph's brothers are so certain of their innocence that they pronounce a severe sentence upon themselves should the charge prove to be true (verse 9). Joseph's steward recommends a much more lenient penalty (verse 10), then begins searching the sacks, eventually finding the cup in question in the sack of Benjamin (verses 11-12).<sup>545</sup> Joseph's brothers react strongly to the shocking discovery (verse 13a; cf. Genesis 37:34).<sup>546</sup> To their credit, however, they stick with Benjamin, showing that a familial solidarity is forming and passing the test Joseph had apparently given them (see footnote 541).<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>542</sup> Did Joseph actually do so? If so, Calvin (2:369) is right in charging Joseph with a grievous sin. Divination would later be prohibited in the Law (see Leviticus 19:26 and Deuteronomy 18:10).

<sup>543</sup> Divination with such a drinking vessel most likely involved interpreting the movements of a particular liquid poured into it. Accordingly, Hamilton (2:557) translates verse 5a: "Is it not the one from which my master drinks and moreover the one in which he practices divination?" According to Hamilton (2:559), this practice is known as lecanomancy. If it involves pouring oil into water, it is known as oleomancy. If it involves pouring water into oil, it is known as hydromancy.

<sup>544</sup> The NIV renders verse 8: "We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house?"

<sup>545</sup> Mathews (2:800), commenting on Joseph's steward, states: "He does not tip off the plot by going directly to Benjamin's bag but plays out the ruse in an Oscar-winning performance!" The incident here is reminiscent of the one back in chapter 31. There, Laban (≈ Joseph's steward) accuses Jacob (≈ Jacob's sons) of stealing his teraphim (≈ Joseph's silver cup). Jacob (≈ Jacob's sons) is completely unaware that the item in question is, indeed, in the possession of one of the members of his party. Jacob (≈ Jacob's sons) denies the charge. Jacob (≈ Jacob's sons) recommends death (≈ death) as the penalty for the one in whose possession the stolen item is found. Laban (≈ Joseph's steward) searches Jacob's tents (≈ the sacks of Jacob's sons). The tent of Rachel (≈ the sack of Benjamin), the one in which the item in question is located, is searched last. In the chapter 31 incident, the stolen item is not discovered, whereas in chapter 44 it is. Furthermore, in the chapter 31 incident the item was truly stolen, while in chapter 44 it was not.

<sup>546</sup> Literally, "tearing their clothes in a rage" (Sailhamer, p. 253).

<sup>547</sup> "This decision on their part speaks volumes about the change in character that had taken place in their lives the past twenty years ...." (Henry Morris, quoted in Swindoll, p. 76).

## **44:14-34**

Upon reentering Joseph's house, his brothers bow down to him once again (verse 14; cf. 42:6, 43:26, and 28). In what Hamilton (2:565) calls an "intriguing clause," Joseph says to his brothers: "Wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?" (verse 15b). In other words, "Did you think you could get away with stealing my cup? You know I am a master of divination and would have found you out, one way or the other" (Hamilton, 2:565). Judah, serving as spokesman for the group, enters a guilty plea<sup>548</sup> and recommends a penalty of enslavement for all eleven of them (verse 16). Joseph limits the penalty to enslavement for the alleged perpetrator (verse 17; cf. 44:10); thus, another son of Rachel is on the verge of being enslaved in Egypt. Once again (see footnote 541), Joseph appears to be putting his brothers to the test: "Joseph is testing his brothers' concern and compassion for Benjamin. 'Will they dump Benjamin into my hands as callously as they dumped me into the hands of those foreign traders so many years ago?'" (Swindoll, p. 77). Joseph's brothers pass the test with flying colors, as seen by Judah's intercession for Benjamin (verses 18-34).<sup>549</sup> Judah's speech is marked by concern for Benjamin, whose place in prison Judah offers to take<sup>550</sup> (verses 33-34), and for Jacob.<sup>551</sup> "This is not the Judah of old" (Ross, p. 667).<sup>552</sup> Years earlier (in chapter 37), Judah prevented a favored son from returning home. Now he is doing everything he can to return Benjamin to Jacob.

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<sup>548</sup> According to some, the crime Judah is pleading guilty to in verse 16 is not so much the alleged theft of the silver cup, but rather what he and his brothers did to Joseph in chapter 37.

<sup>549</sup> Judah's speech to Joseph in Genesis 44:18-34 is, according to Hamilton (2:569), "the lengthiest human speech recorded in Genesis." Swindoll (p. 77) calls it "an impassioned speech that is unexcelled in all the Old Testament." Ross (p. 663) simply calls it "marvelous."

<sup>550</sup> "Judah's willingness to suffer as a substitute for his brother foreshadowed the substitutionary, vicarious atonement of his ultimate Son, Christ Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Hughes, p. 515).

<sup>551</sup> "[Judah] is selflessly willing to accept his own misery rather than put others in misery" (Walton, *Genesis*, p. 682). "It is possible that Joseph's schemes had been intended to probe his brothers' attitude toward each other and toward their father. He also wanted to test the sincerity of their repentance. Were they willing to break the heart of Jacob again as they had many years ago when they showed him Joseph's bloodstained robe? Judah's expression of deep concern and tender sympathy for Jacob more than answered the question" (Davis, p. 282).

<sup>552</sup> In the past, Judah had little concern for an imprisoned brother (Judah was the one who came up with the idea of selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites, 37:26-27). Now he does. "Just as he had made the suggestion to sell Joseph, ... so he is the one who steps forward, now refusing to 'sell' Benjamin" (Walton, *Genesis*, p. 681). "A spiritual metamorphosis for the better has certainly taken place in Judah. His speech to Joseph in ch. 44 represents a profound advancement over his speech about Joseph in 37:26ff. He who once callously engineered the selling of Joseph to strangers out of envy and anger is now willing to become Joseph's slave so that the rest of his brothers, and especially Benjamin, may be freed and allowed to return to Canaan to rejoin their father" (Hamilton, 2:570).

## Lesson 24: Genesis 45-46

In Genesis 45-46, the Joseph narrative (37:2-50:26) continues. In chapter 45, Joseph finally reveals his true identity to his brothers. After commanding everyone else to leave the room (verse 1), Joseph, weeping (verse 2), utters two words (in Hebrew), “I am Joseph” (verse 3a; cf. verse 4b), that leave his brothers speechless (verse 3b). Joseph looked at life from a divine, vertical perspective, rather than from a human, horizontal perspective. Joseph understood that God in His providence had used the sinful actions of his brothers to put him in a position to save the nation of Israel from extinction, thus perpetuating the fertility promise (verses 5-8; cf. Genesis 50:20). Joseph urges his brothers to quickly retrieve their father from Canaan and, thus, reunite the entire family for the first time in over two decades (verses 9-13). In the meantime, Joseph and his brothers are reunited (verses 14-15). When Pharaoh learns about what has happened, he is pleased (verse 16) and instructs Joseph to instruct his brothers to take some Egyptian wagons with them to retrieve their father and their families from Canaan and to relocate them to Egypt (verses 17-20; cf. verse 10). Joseph sends his brothers on their way, providing them with everything they need for the trip there and back (verses 21-24). When Joseph’s brothers arrive in Canaan, they tell their father that Joseph is alive and well (verses 25-26a). At first, Jacob is stunned by the news (verse 26b). After letting it all sink in, however, he revives and resolves to go to Egypt to see his long lost son (verses 27-28).

Chapter 46 records the journey of Jacob and his family from Canaan to Egypt, including a listing (primarily) of the males who went. Before leaving the Promised Land of Canaan and crossing the border into Egypt, Jacob stops at Beersheba to offer sacrifices to God (verse 1). God appears to Jacob there and reiterates the fertility and land promises of the Abrahamic covenant (verses 2-4). Jacob continues his journey to see Joseph, accompanied by his entire family (verses 5-7). Some of the family members who accompanied Jacob to Egypt are listed in verses 8-27, a list that includes Jacob’s sons (all twelve, eleven of whom accompanied him to Egypt, Joseph excepted), one of his daughters (Dinah), his grandsons (fifty-three, forty-nine of whom accompanied him to Egypt, Er, Onan, Manasseh, and Ephraim excepted), one of his granddaughters (Serah), and his great grandsons (four). Jacob sends Judah as his advance scout to guide him to Goshen (verse 28). When Jacob arrives in Goshen, Joseph meets him there, and father and son are reunited for the first time in twenty-two years<sup>553</sup> (verses 29-30). The reunion having taken place, the family’s focus turns to relocation (the end of chapter 46 and the beginning of chapter 47), as preparations are made for a meeting with Pharaoh to receive formal approval to settle in Goshen (verses 31-34).

### **45:1-15**

Unfortunately, a chapter division (chapter divisions were not part of the original, inspired Hebrew text of Genesis) has been made at this point, taking a little steam out of the developing drama. No doubt moved by Judah’s impassioned plea (44:18-34), Joseph

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<sup>553</sup> Joseph 17 years old in 37:2; Joseph 30 years old in 41:46; 7 years of plenty come and go in 41:53; 2 of the 7 years of famine complete in 45:6.

cannot keep his true identity from his brothers any longer. After everyone else leaves the room at Joseph's command (verse 1), Joseph breaks down (verse 2) and tells his brothers who he really is (verse 3a<sup>554</sup>). Perhaps fearing for their lives, his brothers do not, at first, take the news well (verse 3b). The Hebrew verb translated "troubled" in verse 3b can also mean "stunned" or "terrified" (Hamilton, 2:571). Perhaps as a way of alleviating their alarm and/or of further convincing them that it is really him (cf. verse 12), Joseph asks his brothers to come closer to him (verse 4a) and tells them again who he is (verse 4b).

To further set them at ease, Joseph puts their crime in perspective—a divine, vertical perspective<sup>555</sup> (the opposite of the human, horizontal perspective of Jacob—see comments on 43:6), in what Ross (p. 673) calls "a classic expression of providence" and what Hughes (p. 519) calls "a magisterial, theological declaration of divine providence—that God works his will in and through the actions of all people, whether good or bad." Remember, when things look down, don't look around—look up! While it was true that Joseph's brothers were the ones who, from a mere human, horizontal perspective, put Joseph in Egypt (verses 4b and 5a; notice how Joseph rightly pins the blame on his brothers in this regard, not on the Ishmaelites/Midianites), ultimately it was God who put him there (a point Joseph makes three times in verses 5, 7, and 8; cf. verse 9; God "sent" Joseph, as if on a mission—see Psalm 105:17; God in His providence sends us to a certain place for a certain time for a certain purpose/mission). God sent Joseph to Egypt for a specific purpose, to save his family (the entire nation of Israel) from extinction by starvation (verses 5b-8; cf. Genesis 50:20) and, thereby, keep the fertility promise on track.<sup>556</sup> God in His providence can, and continually does, use the sinful actions of man, without excusing those sinful actions<sup>557</sup> and without making Himself the author of sin<sup>558</sup>, to accomplish a greater good/His purpose(s).<sup>559</sup> See Acts 2:23 in this

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<sup>554</sup> Notice how in verse 3a Joseph can now say, "my" father, whereas before (in 43:27) he could only say, "your" father.

<sup>555</sup> "Joseph's words pull back the narrative veil and allow the reader to see what has been going on behind the scenes" (Sailhamer, p. 257).

<sup>556</sup> "Unlike the earlier patriarchal stories in which the greatest threat to the promises of God was the bearers of those promises, here it is a famine that looms as the enemy. May a natural catastrophe do to the promises of God what a lying Abraham and a conniving Jacob could not do—thwart them?" (Hamilton, 2:576).

<sup>557</sup> "The discovery that through our evil purposes and injurious deeds God has worked out his beneficent will, is certainly not calculated to make us think more lightly of our sin or more highly of ourselves" (Marcus Dods, quoted in Ross, p. 673).

<sup>558</sup> "Good men are ashamed to confess, that what men undertake cannot be accomplished except by the will of God; fearing lest unbridled tongues should cry out immediately, either that God is the author of sin, or that wicked men are not to be accused of crime, seeing they fulfill the counsel of God" (Calvin, 2:378).

regard. Joseph's divine, vertical perspective on the events of the previous two decades was undoubtedly what prevented him from becoming bitter, jaded, vengeful, depressed, etc.<sup>560</sup> over them. Though Joseph had been physically enslaved and imprisoned, he never allowed his spirit to be. "... [A] CAT scan of [Joseph's] soul reveals no spiritual malignancies anywhere. There is not a trace of the cancers of hatred or bitterness or vindictiveness no matter how close we look" (Hughes, p. 459).

Understandably, Joseph is eager to see his father, so he urges his brothers to return to Canaan and ask their father to relocate to Egypt (verse 9; cf. verse 13), the region of Goshen in particular (verse 10), where God through Joseph would take care of him and the entire family during the remaining five years of famine (verse 11).<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> "This is a remarkable passage, in which we are taught that the right course of events is never so disturbed by the depravity and wickedness of men, but that God can direct them to a good end" (Calvin, 2:377). "... [W]e have a great God who works amidst the rich compost of human life to do his will" (Hughes, p. 449).

<sup>560</sup> Ross (p. 675) states in this regard: "Anyone who bears a grudge or hopes to retaliate has not come to appreciate the meaning of the sovereignty of God." Hughes (p. 520) adds: "Believers who see and embrace who God is and what he is doing in life forgive! Hatred and unwillingness to forgive comprise the province of hearts that are ignorant of God and his Word."

<sup>561</sup> Not only will God take care of Jacob and his family in Egypt during the next five years, but during the next 400 years (15:13). Benware (p. 48) states in this regard: "Egypt now became the protector of the infant nation. God was placing his baby nation into the incubator of Egypt until it was grown up enough to fend for itself. Egypt protected Israel in three ways. First, it protected Israel physically. Although the Egyptian army was unaware of it, they were guarding Israel against countless kings and robber bands that could have wiped out this young nation in a matter of hours. Second, Egypt shielded Israel morally. Although Egypt may not have been known for its righteousness, it was superior to the wicked Canaanites. By removing Israel from the degrading influence of these perverse Canaanite people, God was preserving His people from moral failure, which surely would have come if they had been left in Canaan. Third, Egypt secured Israel's racial purity. Israel would certainly have intermarried with the Canaanites (as Genesis 34 reveals), but they would not intermarry with the Egyptians. The Egyptians looked down on the Israelites because of their occupation of shepherding (46:34), and this was a key factor in keeping these two peoples apart." Hamilton (2:625) sums: "Egypt is to Jacob and his family what the ark was to Noah—a temporary shelter from the disaster on the outside." Contributing to all of the above is the fact that the region of Goshen was a secluded one. As Hamilton (2:591) states: "That Jacob is the root from which a great nation is to be formed in the relatively secluded Egyptian region of Goshen, rather than in Canaan, implies that this nation will be insulated from outside influences that may impinge on their group identity." Davis (p. 290) adds: "[Goshen] was isolated from the Egyptians, permitting the Hebrews to live their own lives and practice their own culture."

In a scene reminiscent of the reunion of Jacob and Esau back in 33:4, Joseph and his brothers are physically (verses 14-15a), as well as verbally (verse 15b; notice the contrast with 37:4), reunited.

### **45:16-28**

When Pharaoh receives word that Joseph's brothers have come to Egypt (verse 16), he tells Joseph to tell his brothers to return to Canaan (verse 17), bring their father and their families to Egypt (verse 18a), and settle in "the good of the land" (verse 18; cf. verse 20). Pharaoh also orders Joseph to provide his brothers with wagons from Egypt in which to transport their father and their families from Canaan to Egypt (verse 19). Not only does Joseph give his brothers wagons for the journey (verse 21), but also clothing and money (verse 22<sup>562</sup>), food (verse 23b), and "the good things of Egypt" (verse 23a). As his brothers depart, Joseph warns them not to fight along the way (verse 24; cf. 42:22).

When Joseph's brothers arrive in Canaan (verse 25), they tell their father ("Dad, you're not gonna believe this, but ...") that Joseph is alive and very well, to say the least (verse 26a). As might be expected, Jacob is initially stunned<sup>563</sup> in disbelief by the news (verse 26b). His disbelief quickly dissipates, however (verses 27-28<sup>564</sup>). "Jacob's response on hearing that Joseph is alive is parallel to the response of the disciples when they were told that Jesus was alive—shock, unbelief, which eventually turns to uncontrollable joy" (Hamilton, 2:587).

### **46:1-7**

While traveling from Canaan (most likely Hebron, 37:14) to Egypt and just before leaving the Promised Land and crossing the border into Egypt, Jacob stops in Beersheba to offer sacrifices (verse 1). Just as God appeared to Isaac in Beersheba in 26:23-24, so He appears to Jacob in Beersheba in 46:2-4.<sup>565</sup> God appears to Jacob in

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<sup>562</sup> "He who once was stripped of his clothes by his brothers [in 37:23] now clothes those same brothers" (Hamilton, 2:586). In like manner, he who was once sold by his brothers for twenty pieces of silver (in 37:28) once again (cf. 42:25 and 44:1) gives his brothers (although, this time, only Benjamin) silver. Why is Joseph still (cf. 43:34) favoring Benjamin (verse 22)? Is this one last test of their character (see comments on 43:34)? Has the sin of favoritism, so prevalent in previous generations of the family (see especially 25:28 and 37:3), infected Joseph, too?

<sup>563</sup> According to M. D. Johnson (cited in Hamilton, 2:586), the meaning of the verb translated "fainted" in verse 26 "seems to be that of being frozen or numbed, a condition of inability to function."

<sup>564</sup> Jacob's words in verse 28, "Joseph my son is yet alive" may be compared with those of the Prodigal Son's father in Luke 15:24, "this my son was dead, and is alive again."

<sup>565</sup> The similarities are many. The appearances are at night (26:24 and 46:2). God identifies Himself with similar titles ("I am the God of Abraham thy father," 26:24; "I am God, the God of thy father," 46:3). God commands them not to fear (26:24 and 46:3). God promises His



a vision of the night (cf. God's appearance to Abraham in a nocturnal vision in chapter 15) (verse 2; cf. 22:11). God identifies Himself (verse 3a; cf. 15:7, 17:1, 26:24, 28:13, and 35:11) and tells Jacob not to fear (cf. 15:1, 21:17, and 26:24) to go to Egypt (cf. 12:10, where Abraham goes to Egypt during a famine; cf. 26:2, where God forbids Isaac to go to Egypt during a famine), for Egypt would be the place where the fertility promise would be fulfilled (verse 3b; cf. Genesis 12:2 and Exodus 1:1-7).<sup>566</sup> This is the third time that God makes the fertility promise to Jacob (cf. 28:14 and 35:11). God promises to be with Jacob and his descendants in Egypt (verse 4a; cf. 26:3, 24, and 28:15) and to bring them back to the Promised Land of Canaan<sup>567</sup> (verse 4b; cf. 15:14, 16, and 28:15) four hundred years later (Genesis 15:13). This is the third time that God makes the land promise to Jacob (cf. 28:13, 15, and 35:12). Jacob would return to the Promised Land in body only (see Genesis 50:12-13), for God tells him in verse 4c that he will die in Egypt, with Joseph closing his eyes in death (verse 4c). After leaving Beersheba, Jacob and his entire family<sup>568</sup> continue their trek to Egypt (verses 5-7).

### **46:8-27**

In these verses, Moses lists (primarily) the male members of Jacob's extended family at the time of the relocation from Canaan to Egypt, most of whom accompanied Jacob on the trip to Egypt. Verses 8-15 list 6 sons, 1 daughter<sup>569</sup>, 25 grandsons, and 2 great grandsons of Jacob by Leah, 34 names in all. According to verse 15, the total is 33. Since the list is a list of those who went to Egypt with Jacob (verse 8; cf. verses 26 and 27), Er and Onan do not count (verse 12; cf. Genesis 38:7 and 10), thus reducing the number to 32. The 33<sup>rd</sup> person is most likely an unnamed daughter or granddaughter (cf. 46:7 and 15). Verses 16-18 list 2 sons, 11 grandsons, 1 granddaughter<sup>570</sup>, and 2

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presence (26:24 and 46:4). God reiterates the fertility promise (I "will bless thee, and multiply thy seed," 26:24; "I will there make of thee a great nation," 46:3).

<sup>566</sup> "Egypt was to be the place where the house of Jacob would become the nation of Israel" (Sailhamer, p. 259). "Egypt will become the womb for this great nation" (Hamilton, 2:591).

<sup>567</sup> The reiteration of the land promise to Jacob at this point would have been especially reassuring, as he is about to leave the Promised Land, never to return again, at least not in spirit (see comments on verse 4c), and as his descendants would not return to it for another four centuries (see comments on verse 4b).

<sup>568</sup> "The text makes a point of saying that all Jacob's offspring go to Egypt (46:6-7) to make it clear that no part of the family is left behind ... to hold the fort and preserve the family holdings while the main part leaves. In that sense this is a complete act of faith" (Walton, *Genesis*, p. 684).

<sup>569</sup> The only daughter of Jacob mentioned by name in this list and elsewhere in Genesis is Dinah (verse 15). According to Genesis 46:7 ("daughters," plural), however, Jacob had more than one daughter (although "daughters" in Genesis 46:7 may include both daughters and granddaughters).

great grandsons of Jacob by Zilpah. Verses 19-22 list 2 sons and 12 grandsons of Jacob by Rachel. Verses 23-25 list 2 sons and 5 grandsons of Jacob by Bilhah. Verse 26 gives a grand total of 66 people. This is the number of those in the list who actually accompanied Jacob to Egypt. This figure is derived by adding the numbers in verses 15, 18, 22, and 25 (33+16+14+7=70), then subtracting Joseph, Manasseh, and Ephraim from the Rachel list and the unnamed daughter or granddaughter from the Leah list. Verse 27 gives a grand total of 70 (cf. Exodus 1:5 and Deuteronomy 10:22).<sup>571</sup> This figure is derived by adding the numbers in verses 15, 18, 22, and 25 (33+16+14+7=70).

### **46:28-34**

As in chapters 43 (verses 3-5 and 8-10) and 44 (verses 14 and 18-34), Judah once again comes to the fore in chapter 46, as Jacob sends him on ahead of the rest of the group to blaze the trail to Goshen (verse 28).<sup>572</sup> In a scene reminiscent of the reunion of the Prodigal Son and his father in Luke 15:20, Jacob and Joseph are reunited after 22 years of being apart (verse 29). In words reminiscent of those uttered by Simeon after seeing the Christ child in Luke 2:29-30, Jacob declares that he is ready to die, now that he has seen Joseph (verse 30).<sup>573</sup>

Before Joseph's family can settle near him in Goshen, as he desires (see 45:10), Pharaoh will have to give final approval. Thus, Joseph sets the process in motion (verses 31-34). In order to have the best chance of getting Pharaoh to agree to Goshen, Joseph instructs his family to tell Pharaoh that they are shepherds (verse 34;

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<sup>570</sup> The only granddaughter of Jacob mentioned by name in this list is Serah (verse 17). According to Genesis 46:7 ("sons' daughters," plural), however, Jacob had more than one granddaughter.

<sup>571</sup> The 70 figure is the figure consistently given in the Masoretic Text (the Hebrew text of the Old Testament). See Genesis 46:27, Exodus 1:5, and Deuteronomy 10:22 in the Masoretic Text. The figure consistently given in the Septuagint (a famous ancient translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek) is 75. See these same verses in the Septuagint. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls (containing Deuteronomy 10:22) found in Qumran in the middle of the twentieth century also gives the 75 figure. In his sermon in Acts 7, Stephen uses the Septuagint figure (see Acts 7:14). According to Hamilton (2:598), the 75 figure is derived by adding seven more sons to Joseph (from 2 to 9) and by subtracting Joseph and Jacob (Hamilton counts Jacob among the 70 of verse 27). According to Charles Ryrie (*Basic Theology*, p. 103), the 75 figure is derived by adding a son and a grandson to Manasseh and by adding two sons and a grandson to Ephraim.

<sup>572</sup> "It is ironic that Judah is selected to play the lead role, to be the mediator in the forthcoming reuniting of long-separated father and son, for he earlier had played the leading role in separating father from son (37:26ff.)" (Hamilton, 2:601).

<sup>573</sup> Interestingly, Jacob will live another 17 years (47:28), the same number of years he had with Joseph before (37:2).

cf. 13:7-8, 26:14, and 32:14-15). Because Goshen was a remote region, and the Egyptians despised shepherds, it would be the ideal locale.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> “... [T]he Egyptians hated shepherds and they would allow the Israelites to dwell off by themselves in the land of Goshen” (Sailhamer, p. 263). Calvin (2:395) points to another (besides the ones mentioned in footnote 561) benefit of their living in Goshen: “Nevertheless, though it was hard for the holy Fathers to be thus opprobriously rejected, and, as it were, to be loathed by a whole nation; yet this ignominy with which they were branded, was most profitable to themselves. For, had they been mingled with the Egyptians, they might have been scattered far and wide; but now, seeing that they are objects of detestation, and are thought unworthy to be admitted to common society, they learn, in this state of separation from others, to cherish more fervently mutual union between themselves ....”

## Lesson 25: Genesis 47-48

In Genesis 47-48, the Joseph narrative (37:2-50:26) continues. At the start of chapter 47, Joseph brings five of his brothers before Pharaoh to receive his approval for their settlement in Goshen (verses 1-6). Next, Joseph brings his father, Jacob before Pharaoh, and Jacob blesses Pharaoh (verses 7-10). Having received Pharaoh's approval, Joseph situates his family in Goshen (verses 11-12). During the middle of chapter 47, the focus turns from getting Joseph's family situated (verses 1-12) to the famine situation (verses 13-26; essentially picking up where the end of chapter 41 left off). After the Egyptians (and the Canaanites) exhaust all of their monetary resources buying grain from Joseph (verses 13-15), they sell all their livestock to Joseph for more food (verses 16-17). When this food runs out, they (the priests excepted, verse 22) sell their land and themselves to Joseph in exchange for more food and for seed (verses 18-21). In the process, Joseph initiates a feudalistic system whereby the people farm the land, keeping 80% of the yield for themselves and giving 20% to Pharaoh (verses 22-24), a system to which the Egyptian people gladly agree (verse 25), and a system that was still operative in Moses' day (verse 26). At the end of chapter 47, the focus returns (cf. the start of the chapter, verses 1-12) to Joseph's family (verses 27-31), picking up where verses 11 and 12 left off. In fulfillment of the fertility promise, the family of Jacob "grew" and "multiplied exceedingly" in Egypt (verse 27; cf. Exodus 1:7). Jacob lives in Egypt during the final seventeen years of his life (verse 28). Sensing that his days on earth are coming to a close (cf. comments on the early part of chapter 27), Jacob makes Joseph swear that he will bury him in Canaan, not Egypt (verses 29-31).

Chapter 48 commences as chapter 47 concludes, by focusing on Jacob's final days. Upon hearing that his father is "sick" (verse 1a), Joseph brings his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim to their grandfather's bedside so that Jacob might bless the boys before his death (verses 1b-2). Jacob tells Joseph about God's appearance to him at Bethel back in 35:9-15 (verses 3-4); "adopts" the two boys, thereby making them equal with their uncles and, thus, co-inheritors with them of the Promised Land (verses 5-6); and recounts the death of Rachel (verse 7; cf. 35:16-20). Most of the remainder of chapter 48 is the account of Jacob blessing Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph, assuming that Manasseh, the older of the two boys was to receive the greater blessing, positions the two boys accordingly (verse 13). Jacob, however, crosses his hands, thereby bestowing the greater blessing on Ephraim, the younger of the two boys (verse 14). Joseph, believing his father to be mistaken, attempts to rectify the situation (verses 17-18). Jacob, however, informs Joseph that he is the one who is mistaken: Ephraim is to have the preeminence (verses 19-20). Chapter 48 concludes with Jacob declaring his faith in the land promise (verse 21) and once again (cf. 37:3) elevating Joseph above his brothers by giving him a special gift (verse 22).

### **47:1-12**

At the end of chapter 46 (verses 31-34), Joseph prepped his family for a face-to-face meeting with Pharaoh to gain final approval for their settlement in Goshen. This

meeting takes place at the start of chapter 47. Joseph brings five of his brothers<sup>575</sup> to Pharaoh (verses 1-2). Just as Joseph had anticipated (see 46:33), Pharaoh asks them about their occupation (verse 3a). After answering Pharaoh's question (verse 3b), the brothers formally request his permission to live<sup>576</sup> in Goshen (verse 4). Pharaoh grants their request (verse 6; cf. 45:18).

Joseph then brings his father to Pharaoh (verse 7a), and Jacob blesses<sup>577</sup> Pharaoh (verse 7b). "Perhaps Jacob prayed that the pharaoh may be blessed with a long life. The OT has several instances of a subject entering the presence of royalty and exclaiming, 'O king, live forever!' (2 Sam. 16:16; 1 K. 1:31; Dan. 2:4; 5:10; 6:7 [Eng. 6]). Such a blessing might also explain why in the next verse Pharaoh inquires about how long Jacob has lived" (Hamilton, 2:611). In response to Pharaoh's question about Jacob's age (verse 8), Jacob tells Pharaoh that he is 130 years old<sup>578</sup> and that he has not had the quantity of life, nor the quality of life, that his father (see 35:28-29 and comments on) or his grandfather (see 25:7-8 and comments on) had enjoyed (verse 9). The primary reason why the years of Jacob's life had been "evil" (verse 9) was Jacob himself.<sup>579</sup> Before leaving Pharaoh's presence, Jacob blesses<sup>580</sup> him again (verse 10). God will, indeed, bless Pharaoh in the days to follow (see verses 13-26).<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> According to Jewish tradition (see Hamilton, 2:606), the five were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, and Benjamin.

<sup>576</sup> Significantly, the brothers say "sojourn" in verse 4, indicative of the fact that their stay in Goshen was to be temporary, not permanent. The sojourn, however, would be quite a lengthy one—four centuries (cf. Genesis 15:13).

<sup>577</sup> The Hebrew verb translated "blessed" in verse 7 has a very wide "semantic range." Within its semantic range is the idea of greeting: see "salute" in 2 Kings 4:29 and "saluted" in 2 Kings 10:15. Thus, when Jacob blesses Pharaoh in verse 7, it may be nothing more than a greeting.

<sup>578</sup> Significantly, Jacob speaks of his years on earth as "the years of my pilgrimage" (verse 9), indicative of the fact that "this earth is not [our] home, [we're] just a passin' through" (cf. Hebrews 11:13-16, 1 Peter 1:17, and 2:11).

<sup>579</sup> Two examples: Jacob suffered the natural consequences of his sin (deception) in chapter 27 (has to leave home) and of his sin (favoritism) in chapter 37 (deprived of Joseph for over 20 years). In both instances, his sin (specifically, its consequences) made life miserable for him.

<sup>580</sup> The Hebrew verb translated "blessed" in verse 10 is the same one translated "blessed" in verse 7. As mentioned in footnote 577, this verb has a very wide semantic range. Within its semantic range is the idea of saying goodbye or farewell. Thus, when Jacob blesses Pharaoh in verse 10, it may be nothing more than a goodbye or farewell.

<sup>581</sup> "Vv. 13-26, which detail Joseph's agrarian reforms, serve as a stunning illustration of the consequence of Jacob's blessing on Pharaoh" (Hamilton, 2:611).

Having received Pharaoh's approval, Joseph settles his family in "the land of Rameses" (verse 11). Rameses (cf. Exodus 12:37, Numbers 33:3 and 5) may have been a specific area within Goshen (see NIV's "district of Rameses").

### **47:13-26**

In the previous section (46:31-47:12), Joseph's family received land in Egypt due to Joseph. In this section, Pharaoh receives land in Egypt due to Joseph. In this section, the focus shifts from Joseph's family back to (cf. the end of chapter 41) the famine. The famine is so severe (verse 13; cf. 41:31, 56-57, 43:1, and 47:20) that all the Egyptians and all the Canaanites have to exhaust their monetary resources to survive it, giving all their money to Pharaoh by way of Joseph in exchange for grain (verse 14). When this food runs out, the Egyptians come to Joseph for more (verse 15). Joseph gives them more food in exchange for all their livestock (verses 16-17). When this food runs out a year later, the Egyptians return to Joseph and offer their land and themselves as slaves in exchange for more food and for seed (verses 18-19). Joseph agrees to this proposal, thereby purchasing the entire land of Egypt for Pharaoh (verse 20), with the exception of "the land of the priests" (verse 22; cf. verse 26b)<sup>582</sup>, and enslaving the entire Egyptian populace (verse 21<sup>583</sup>). Though their land is now owned by the Egyptian government, the Egyptian people are allowed to live on it, farm it, and keep 80% of its yield (verses 23-24). The Egyptian people are ecstatic about this arrangement because by it Joseph saves their lives (verse 25; cf. Genesis 45:5, 7, and 50:20).<sup>584</sup> The feudalistic system Joseph inaugurates<sup>585</sup> at this time is still in effect in Egypt centuries later (verse 26a).

### **47:27-31**

The narrative shifts from the famine (42:13-26) back to (cf. 42:1-47:12) Joseph's family, from the "death" of the land to the impending death of Jacob (Mathews, 2:849). Verse 27 is a significant verse, for it is testimony to the fulfillment of the fertility promise (cf. Exodus 1:7). Verse 28 advances the narrative 17 years to the end of Jacob's life.

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<sup>582</sup> The priests did not need to sell their land to Pharaoh for food because their nutritional needs were already being met by Pharaoh (verse 22).

<sup>583</sup> There is some debate regarding the translation of verse 21. Hamilton (2:616), following the Septuagint (a famous ancient translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek), the Samaritan Pentateuch (a Samaritan version of the Hebrew Pentateuch), and the Vulgate (a translation of the entire Bible into Latin by Jerome), translates verse 21 as follows: "The people he reduced to servitude from one end of Egypt to the other." The KJV rendering follows the Masoretic Text (the standardized text of the Hebrew Old Testament).

<sup>584</sup> "Joseph is a nondiscriminating savior. His concern for Egyptians is no less than his concern for his own family" (Hamilton, 2:618).

<sup>585</sup> "Joseph takes responsibility for some essential agrarian reforms. If Egypt is to continue to survive its unpredictable climate, then more than grain handouts is needed. The basic system of land tenure will need to be revised. This is Joseph's long-range proposal for what will likely be a recurring event" (Hamilton, 2:618).

Before Jacob dies, he makes Joseph promise him under oath that he will bury him in Canaan (specifically, in the cave of Machpelah; cf. Genesis 23:17-20, 25:9-10, 49:29-32, and 50:13), rather than in Egypt (verses 29-31a; cf. Joseph's similar request in Genesis 50:25), by having Joseph place his hand under his [Jacob's] thigh (verse 29; cf. 24:9 and comments on) while making the promise. "Jacob's desire to be buried [in Canaan] clearly indicated his explicit faith in the covenant promises of God" (Davis, p. 292; cf. comments on chapter 23). This incident concludes with Jacob bowing himself upon the bed's head (verse 31b; cf. David in 1 Kings 1:47). There is some debate, however, as to 1) exactly what Jacob was doing and 2) exactly which object was involved, his bed or his staff. In regards to the first, Ross (p. 692) suggests that Jacob was engaging in "a reverent act of thanksgiving." D. M. Golomb (cited in Hamilton, 2:622), on the other hand, suggests that Jacob simply fell down exhausted on his bed (cf. 48:2). In regards to the second, the Septuagint opts for "staff" (so also the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 11:21, following the Septuagint), while the Masoretic Text opts for "bed."

### **48:1-7**

Joseph is informed that his father is sick (verse 1a). Whatever Jacob's malady was, it would prove to be fatal. Sensing the seriousness of the situation, Joseph brings his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim<sup>586</sup> to his father/their grandfather (verse 1b).<sup>587</sup> When Joseph and the boys enter the room, Jacob musters enough strength to sit up in his bed (verse 2). In verses 3 and 4, Jacob tells them about his encounter with God at Luz (also known as Bethel, 28:19 and 35:6) back in 35:9-15 (cf. Jacob's encounter with God at Luz/Bethel in 28:11-19), recalling 1) the blessing God gave him (verse 3; cf. 35:9); 2) the fertility promise God gave him (verse 4a; cf. 35:11); and 3) the land promise<sup>588</sup> God gave him (verse 4b; cf. 35:12). In doing so, Jacob is passing the truth on to future generations (cf. Psalm 78:1-8 and 2 Timothy 2:2). In verse 5, Jacob "adopts"<sup>589</sup> Joseph's two sons (cf. 48:16's "let my name be named on them"), thus placing them on an equal level with their uncles<sup>590</sup>, and bestows upon them the birthright and blessing

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<sup>586</sup> Manasseh and Ephraim are most likely in their 20s at this time. They were born during the seven years of plenty (41:50). Two years into the famine (45:6), Jacob, at the age of 130 (47:9), moves to Egypt. Jacob is now 147 (47:28).

<sup>587</sup> "Joseph's humble presence was itself an act of submissive faith because he had come to personally identify his boys with God's people. Such identification with the shepherd clan (so abominated by the Egyptians) would ultimately shut them off to Egyptian prominence. Joseph's presence with his sons was a by-faith exercise in downward mobility" (Hughes, p. 542). In this respect, Joseph does what Moses will one day do (Hebrews 11:24-26).

<sup>588</sup> "Jacob's repetition of this particular encounter with God may be a gentle reminder to Joseph that Egypt is a temporary abode" (Hamilton, 2:629).

<sup>589</sup> "Perhaps it is best to say that this case involves adoption only in its broadest sense" (Hamilton, 2:629).

normally reserved for the firstborn, thus putting them in the place of Reuben and Simeon (cf. 1 Chronicles 5:1-2). Notice how in verse 5 Jacob lists Ephraim, the younger, first and Manasseh, the older, last, a prelude of what is about to transpire. In verse 7, Jacob tells Joseph about his mother's death and burial (cf. 35:16-20). Jacob wants to remind Joseph where his mother is buried—in the Promised Land.

### **48:8-22**

Jacob turns his attention away from his son to his grandsons. Because of his failing eyesight (verse 10a; cf. Isaac's failing eyesight in 27:1), Jacob cannot identify Manasseh and Ephraim from a distance (verse 8), so Joseph helps him out (verse 9a<sup>591</sup>). Jacob asks Joseph to bring the two boys closer to him so he can bless them (verse 9b).<sup>592</sup> Verses 10b-11 are touching in more ways than one. Notice how Jacob in verse 11 ("God hath"), like Joseph in verse 9 ("God has"), views life from a God-centered perspective (cf. comments on 45:4-8). Verse 12a may give the impression that Joseph is removing Manasseh and Ephraim from Jacob's lap. However, as Hamilton (2:635) states: "If Joseph removes Ephraim and Manasseh from Jacob's knees, then that would indicate that they were still relatively small and young, little lads. In fact, they must be near twenty, for they were born to Joseph before Jacob came to Egypt seventeen years earlier [see footnote 586]. It is unlikely that a bedridden, elderly, blind, and sickly man could support two young men on his knees. The phrase must mean, then, that Ephraim and Manasseh stood by their grandfather's bed, near his knees."

The time for Jacob to bless Joseph's sons arrives. Joseph brings the boys to Jacob, positioning them in such a way that Jacob's right hand would be placed upon the head

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<sup>590</sup> Is this another instance of Jacob showing favoritism toward Joseph, essentially giving Joseph twice as much as his brothers? "Jacob confers on his son [Joseph] the special privilege, that he, being one, should constitute two chiefs; that is, that his two sons should succeed to an equal right with their uncles, as if they had been heirs in the first degree" (Calvin, 2:424).

<sup>591</sup> Commenting on Joseph's words in verse 9a, "my sons, whom God hath given me," Calvin (2:425) states: "And in the answer of Joseph we observe, what we have elsewhere alluded to, that the fruit of the womb is not born by chance, but is to be reckoned among the precious gifts of God. This confession indeed finds a ready utterance from the tongues of all; but there are few who heartily acknowledge that their seed has been given them by God." See comments on 33:5.

<sup>592</sup> "There is a slight touch of irony here: Jacob had secured Isaac's blessing by guile and deceit, while Joseph is securing the blessing for his sons by honesty and forthrightness" (Davis, p. 294). Ross (p. 689) likewise states: "There is irony in the fact that this incident is comparable to the situation in which he had received the blessing over his older brother. Once more the blessing was given to the younger, but this time there was no deception or bitterness. This time the blessing was given openly, in accord with God's plan." So also Mathews (2:877): "Jacob's loss of sight [48:10] reminds the reader of Isaac's failing eyesight (27:1) and Jacob's deception of Isaac (27:1-29), drawing a contrast between the virtue of Joseph and that of his father in his youth."



of the oldest, Manasseh, thereby conferring the greater blessing on him (verse 13). Jacob, however, crosses his hands (verse 14).<sup>593</sup> Jacob pronounces a blessing upon his grandsons<sup>594</sup> in verses 15 and 16 (cf. Hebrews 11:21). Jacob calls God the God “before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk” (verse 15a; cf. 17:1, 24:40, and footnote 204) and “the God which fed me all my life long unto this day” (verse 15b; cf. Psalm 23). What a precious verse is 15b! “The Angel which redeemed [Jacob] from all evil” (from Laban in chapter 31, Esau in chapter 33, etc.) in verse 16 is most likely a reference to the angel of the LORD (see comments on 16:7). Joseph’s protest notwithstanding (verses 17-19), Jacob proceeds to give Ephraim the greater blessing (verse 20). “Manasseh thus joins a long list of firstborn in Genesis who for one reason or other<sup>595</sup> are passed by—Cain, Ishmael, Esau, Reuben, and Zerah” (Hamilton, 2:636).

Jacob assures Joseph of God’s presence (cf. Genesis 21:20, 22, 26:3, 24, 28, 28:15, 20, 31:3, 35:3, 39:2, 3, 21, 23, and 46:4) and of His promise (verse 21), then gives Joseph a special gift (one last display of favoritism, a la 37:3?), a parcel of ground (verse 22; cf. John 4:5).

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<sup>593</sup> Commenting on this verse, Ross (p. 689) states: “Believers learn throughout life to accept God’s crossing up of the normal conventions, for God’s ways are not the ways of humankind.” In a similar vein, Marcus Dods (quoted in Ross, p. 694) states: “We meet with these crossed hands of blessing frequently in Scripture; the younger son blessed above the elder—as was needful, lest grace should become confounded with nature, and the belief gradually grow up in men’s minds that natural effects could never be overcome by grace, and that in every respect grace waited upon nature. And these crossed hands we meet still; for how often does God quite reverse *our* order, and bless most that about which we had less concern, and seem to put a slight on that which has engrossed our best affection.”

<sup>594</sup> Hamilton (2:633), following the Septuagint, translates the start of verse 15: “He blessed them . . . .”

<sup>595</sup> Calvin (2:431) offers a reason: “... [H]e [God] confers the honour upon the younger, for the purpose of showing that he is bound by no claims of human merit; but that he distributes his gifts freely, as it seems good unto him.” In like manner, Walton (*Genesis*, p. 711) writes: “Jacob insists on favoring the younger Ephraim over his older brother. As surprising as this appears to be to Joseph, to the readers of Genesis it occasions only a wry grin (here we go again!). This recurring motif could well stand as a testimony to grace as blessing comes to those who have least reason to expect it.”

## Lesson 26: Genesis 49-50

In Genesis 49-50, the Joseph narrative (37:2-50:26) concludes. In chapter 49, Jacob pronounces blessings (and, in some cases, cursings) upon his twelve sons (verses 1-28) and charges them to bury him in Canaan (verses 29-32; cf. 47:29-31). Jacob then dies at the age of 147 (verse 33; cf. 47:28). In chapter 50, Joseph mourns his father's death (verse 1) and orders his embalming (verses 2-3a). The Egyptians also mourn Jacob's death (verse 3b). Joseph then seeks and receives Pharaoh's permission to entomb his father in Canaan (verses 4-6), which he does, accompanied by an enormous entourage of both Jews and Egyptians (verses 7-9). Along the way from Egypt to Canaan, the funeral procession stops for seven days at "the threshingfloor of Atad"/"Abel-mizraim" to further mourn Jacob's death (verses 10-11). Jacob is buried in Canaan (verses 12-13), and the entourage returns to Egypt (verse 14). Now that their father is dead, Joseph's brothers fear that Joseph will avenge their atrocity against him forty years<sup>596</sup> earlier (verses 15-18). Joseph, magnanimous to the end, reassures his brothers of his forgiveness of them and of his love for them (verses 19-21), once again (cf. 39:9 and 45:4-9 and comments on) viewing life from a divine, vertical perspective, rather than from a human, horizontal perspective (verse 20). The book of Genesis ends with the report of Joseph's final days. Joseph dies in Egypt at the age of 110 (verse 22; cf. verse 26a), long enough to see his great-grandsons (verse 23). Joseph assures his brothers of God's provision and promise (verse 24; cf. 48:21), then makes his brothers promise that they will take his body back with them to Canaan some day (verse 25; cf. 47:29-31 and 49:29-32). Joseph dies and is buried in Egypt (verse 26).

### **49:1-28**<sup>597</sup>

Prior to his death, Jacob is intent on blessing not only Joseph's sons (chapter 48), but also his sons (chapter 49). As in 9:25-27 (Noah's cursing of Canaan and blessing of Shem and Japheth), Jacob's blessings also include some cursings (Reuben, Simeon & Levi). The various blessings and cursings are more or less prophecies of what would happen to the various tribes "in the last days" (verse 1), or the days to come.

Jacob begins with Reuben, his firstborn (verses 3-4). Jacob's blessing upon Reuben is more of a curse. Though Reuben was the firstborn (verse 3), he forfeited his privileged position due to his incest with Bilhah, his father's concubine (verse 4; cf. Genesis 35:22 and 1 Chronicles 5:1). Jacob describes Reuben as "unstable as water" (verse 4), "a vivid metaphor of unstable emotions" (Davis, p. 296). Reuben "had the ungoverned impulse of boiling water" (Ross, pp. 700-701).

Next to be blessed are Jacob's second and third sons, Simeon and Levi, whom Jacob treats as one (verses 5-7). As with Reuben, Jacob's blessing upon Simeon and Levi is more of a curse. Jacob particularly chides the two for their anger, an anger so fierce

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<sup>596</sup> To arrive at this figure, see footnote 553 (at least 22 years) and 47:28 (17 years).

<sup>597</sup> Nearly all of this section (verses 2-27) is poetic (notice the layout in the NASB and in the NIV).

and cruel that it drove them to violence toward both man and beast<sup>598</sup>. In regards to the former, Jacob undoubtedly has their killing of the men of Shechem (in 34:25) in mind. Due to the disgraceful deeds of Simeon and Levi, their tribes would be dissipated (verse 7b).<sup>599</sup>

Next to be blessed is Jacob's fourth son, Judah (verses 8-12). Though the birthright would be given to Joseph, it was from the line of Judah that "the chief ruler" would eventually come (1 Chronicles 5:1-2). Verse 8 contains the first of several wordplays in this passage. According to this verse, Judah's brothers would one day praise him and bow down to him due to his military prowess. The name Judah means "let him be praised" or "he will be praised" (Ross, p. 703; cf. comments on 29:35). Judah's military prowess is further seen by Jacob likening Judah to a lion (verse 9; cf. Numbers 24:9a and Revelation 5:5). Verse 10 is a significant Messianic prophecy, stipulating that the coming Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah (cf. Hebrews 7:14 and Revelation 5:5). Commenting on "sceptre<sup>600</sup>" and "lawgiver" in verse 10, Hamilton (2:658) states: "Both words indicate some kind of staff or rod used by one in authority." The penultimate (the ultimate being the Messiah himself, the Lord Jesus Christ) monarch from the tribe of Judah would be David. The Hebrew words translated "until Shiloh come" in verse 10 are variously understood.<sup>601</sup> Some see Shiloh as a proper name for the coming Messiah (so KJV and NASB). Some see it as a proper name for a place (so NASB marginal note: "until he comes to Shiloh"). Another possibility is that it means "until tribute comes [or is brought] to him" (Walton, *Genesis*, p. 716). Some, such as the NIV, see it as something other than a proper name, translating: "until he comes to whom it belongs" (cf. Hamilton, 2:654<sup>602</sup>). Verse 10 is speaking of the millennial kingdom (cf. Daniel 7:13-14). The kingdom age will be one of plenty. Vines will be so

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<sup>598</sup> R. Péter (quoted in Hamilton, 2:651) describes the laming of oxen spoken of at the end of verse 6: "It involves the practice of provoking paralysis by cutting the tendons of the leg in order to prevent the animal being used as a beast of burden."

<sup>599</sup> "Eventually Simeon is integrated into the tribe of Judah [Josh 19:1].... Levi is dispersed in the sense that the Levites are never given a territory of their own, but are divided among the remaining tribes [Josh 21:1-42]" (Hamilton, 2:652). "The fulfillment of Jacob's words can be found in the fact that the tribe of Simeon virtually disappears from the biblical narratives after the time of the Conquest and in the fact that the tribe of Levi was given the responsibility of the priesthood and hence was not given its own inheritance in the apportioning of the land" (Sailhamer, pp. 275-276).

<sup>600</sup> "The scepter, of course, was the symbol of royal power and in its earliest form was a long staff which the king held in his hand when speaking to public assemblies" (Davis, p. 297).

<sup>601</sup> "This line has provoked more difference of opinion among Hebraists than perhaps any other in the entire book of Genesis" (Hamilton, 2:654-655). Davis (p. 297) similarly states: "the word *Shiloh* continues to be hotly debated."

<sup>602</sup> Hamilton's rendering is slightly different: "until he possesses that which belongs to him."

plenteous that animals will be tied to them, and the fruit of the vine so plenteous that clothes will be washed in it (verse 11).<sup>603</sup>

Jacob's next blessing is given to his tenth son (thus, skipping numbers five through nine for the moment), Zebulun (verse 13). His words are somewhat perplexing, as Zebulun's allotted territory (delineated in Joshua 19:10-16) did not extend as far west as the Mediterranean, Sidon being one of the cities along the Mediterranean coast. Hamilton (2:664) is of the opinion that the body of water in view is the Sea of Galilee (however, Zebulun's tribal boundaries did not extend as far east as the Sea of Galilee). For possible solutions to this interpretive difficulty, see Davis (pp. 298-299) and Hamilton (2:664).

Next to be blessed is Jacob's ninth son, Isaachar (verses 14-15). "One may interpret Jacob's words to Isaachar in two possible ways. The prevailing view is that Jacob paints Isaachar as a group of people who put creaturely comforts (v. 15a-b) ahead of any other value, and as a result it cost them their independence (v. 15c-d)" (Hamilton, 2:667).<sup>604</sup>

Next to be blessed is Jacob's fifth son, Dan (verses 16-18). Verse 16 begins with another (cf. comments on verse 8 above) wordplay. "Dan will judge" in Hebrew is *dan yadin*. Israel's most famous judge, Samson was from the tribe of Dan (Judges 13:2). Jacob likens many of his sons to animals (Judah—lion; Isaachar—donkey; Dan—snake; Naphtali—deer; Benjamin—wolf). Dan is likened to "a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward" (verse 17), i.e., Dan would be victorious over those with superior military might.<sup>605</sup> Verse 18 comes somewhat unexpectedly. Commenting on this verse, Hamilton (2:671) states: "... [I]t is a ringing testimony by the elderly patriarch to his renewed faith in God that he shall one day be delivered by his God and experience eternal salvation."

Next to be blessed is Jacob's seventh son, Gad (verse 19). Verse 19 contains another (cf. comments on verses 8 and 16 above) wordplay. "Gad" in Hebrew is *gad*; "raiders" is *gedud*; "shall raid him" is *yegudennu*; "will raid" is *yagud*. Like Dan, Gad would have military success in spite of its small size.<sup>606</sup>

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<sup>603</sup> "The sense of the imagery is that wine, the symbol of prosperity and blessing, will be so plentiful that even the choicest vines will be put to such everyday use as tethering the animals of burden and vintage wine will be as commonplace as wash water" (Sailhamer, p. 277).

<sup>604</sup> Hamilton himself does not espouse this view, but offers another interpretation, an interpretation that this writer finds far less convincing than the prevailing view.

<sup>605</sup> "The imagery in 49:17 seems to suggest that Dan, although small, will be quite capable of holding his own. His strength will be greater than his size" (Hamilton, 2:670).

<sup>606</sup> "Gad is not big enough to engage in frontal warfare. He must attack from the rear (v. 19b). Mobility rather than number is Gad's major asset" (Hamilton, 2:673).

Next to be blessed is Jacob's eighth son, Asher (verse 20). This tribe would be known for the fine food its fertile fields would yield.

Next to be blessed is Jacob's sixth son, Naphtali (verse 21). Another possible translation for the latter half of verse 21 is the NIV's "that bears beautiful fawns" (so also Hamilton, 2:675).

Next to be blessed is Jacob's eleventh son, Joseph (verses 22-26). Joseph (i.e., the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh) would be prosperous (verse 22). Joseph would be attacked<sup>607</sup> (verse 23), but would withstand such attack (verse 24a) due to God's help<sup>608</sup> (verses 24b<sup>609</sup>-25). Jacob calls God by various names in verses 24b and 25: "the mighty God of Jacob" (cf. Psalm 132:2 and Isaiah 49:26), "the shepherd" (cf. 48:15), "the stone of Israel" (cf. Deuteronomy 32:4), "the God of thy father" (cf. 26:24 and 28:13), and "the Almighty" (cf. 17:1, 28:3, and 35:11). Joseph receives the blessing (verses 25-26; cf. 1 Chronicles 5:1-2).

The last son of Jacob to be blessed is his twelfth and final one, Benjamin (verse 27). Likening Benjamin to a wolf, Jacob forecasts this tribe's military prowess (cf. Judges 20:14-16, 1 Chronicles 8:40, 12:2, 2 Chronicles 14:8, and 17:17). Famous Benjamites in the Bible include Ehud (Judges 3:15), Saul (1 Samuel 9:1-2), and Paul (Romans 11:1 and Philippians 3:5).

The opening words of verse 28, "all these are the twelve tribes of Israel" are generally accurate. Technically, Levi and Joseph were not among the twelve, while Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh were.

### **49:29-33**

Jacob rightly surmises that his death is very near ("I am to be gathered unto my people," verse 29; cf. comments on 25:8b). Once again (cf. 47:29-31), Jacob instructs his family to bury him in Canaan, specifically in the cave of Machpelah (verses 29b-32), the cave that Abraham purchased (in chapter 23) as a family burial site. There, Jacob would join all the patriarchs and matriarchs before him, Rachel excepted (verse 31; cf. comments on 23:19). Jacob, like Abraham (25:8), Ishmael (23:17), and Isaac (35:29) before him, "yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people" (verse 33).

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<sup>607</sup> According to Hamilton (2:680): "'Archers' [in v. 23] is metaphorical for 'slanderers,' as can be seen too in Ps. 89:51-52 (Eng. 50-51) ...."

<sup>608</sup> The NIV rendering of verses 24 and 25 brings out this truth more clearly: "But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, because of your father's God, who helps you ..."

<sup>609</sup> "Hands" in verse 24b is clearly anthropomorphic (see comments on 3:8).

### **50:1-3**

As might be expected, Joseph greatly grieves his father's death (verse 1; cf. 46:29). Joseph commands "his servants the physicians" to embalm his father (verse 2). Since Jacob was embalmed by Egyptians, it is quite probable that his body was mummified. The embalming of Jacob's body took forty days to complete (verse 3a). Incredibly, the Egyptian nation mourns Jacob's death for seventy days (verse 3b).<sup>610</sup> Mourning a Pharaoh's death lasted seventy-two days at most (Ross, p. 715; Hamilton, 2:692). The typical mourning period for Jews was seven days (see Genesis 50:10, 1 Samuel 31:13//1 Chronicles 10:12, and Job 2:13), thirty if the individual was noteworthy (Deuteronomy 34:8, Moses; Numbers 20:29, Aaron).

### **50:4-14**

After the seventy days of mourning for Jacob, Joseph seeks and receives Pharaoh's permission to bury his father in Canaan, as Joseph had promised his father he would do (verses 4-6; cf. 47:29-31). The funeral procession is an astonishing one, comprised of numerous Egyptian officials (verse 7), all the adults in Jacob's extended family (verse 8), and part of the Egyptian army (verse 9).<sup>611</sup> Four hundred years later, the Egyptian army, far from escorting the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan, as here, would pursue the Israelites as they fled from Egypt for Canaan (Exodus 14). On the way to Machpelah, the funeral procession stops for seven days to mourn Jacob's death (verses 10-11). The spot at which they stop, "the threshingfloor of Atad," which Hamilton (2:697) calls an "unidentifiable" site, is named by the locals in accordance with what occurs there: "Abel-mizraim," meaning "mourning of Egypt" (Hamilton, 2:695). Jacob's sons bury their father in the cave of Machpelah, as they had promised, then return to Egypt (verses 12-14).

### **50:15-21**

Now that their father is dead, Jacob's brothers are afraid that Joseph is going to "let 'em have it" for what they did to him forty years earlier (verse 15). Consequently, they send a message on ahead of them to Joseph (cf. Jacob sending a message on ahead of him to Esau in 32:3-5), asking Joseph to forgive them (verses 16-17a).<sup>612</sup> Notice how the

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<sup>610</sup> "Are we to believe that the entire nation of Egypt went into mourning for two-and-a-half months for a transplanted Hebrew living in Goshen? This must be something mandated by Pharaoh as an expression of his respect for the father of the son who saved his empire from starvation" (Hamilton, 2:692).

<sup>611</sup> Hamilton (2:698) mentions one possible reason for this military escort: "Representatives of Pharaoh (v. 7) plus chariots and horsemen (v. 9) provide not only a larger cast of mourners and protection for this funeral cortege, but also function as deterrents should Joseph decide to stay in Canaan." It is hard to imagine any of the Jews failing to return, however, especially in light of the fact that they left their children behind in Egypt (verse 8).

<sup>612</sup> In the message they send to Joseph, Joseph's brothers quote from their father, Jacob. Many are of the opinion that the brothers have fabricated these words. Hamilton (2:703) writes: "We cannot know whether this is a total fabrication by the brothers, or whether Jacob did indeed make

brothers “fess up” to their offense, calling it “evil” (verses 15 and 17), a “trespass”<sup>613</sup> (verse 17), and “sin” (verse 17). Joseph is heartbroken over the message (verse 17b).<sup>614</sup> Joseph’s brothers once again (cf. 42:6, 43:26, 28, and 44:14), this time knowing it is him, bow down before him (verse 18). Joseph reassures his brothers that nothing has changed since their reconciliation of seventeen years earlier (verses 19-21). Joseph refuses to take God’s place by taking revenge (verse 19’s “am I in the place of God?”; cf. Genesis 30:2, Deuteronomy 32:35, and Romans 12:19); though they hated him then (37:4, 5, and 8), he will not hate them now in return; though they at one time “could not speak peaceably unto him” (37:4), yet he “spake kindly unto them” (verse 21). Rather than take vengeance on them, he will continue to take care of them (verse 21; cf. 45:11 and 47:12). In what Ross (p. 716) calls “one of the classical theological statements of the book” and Davis (p. 303) calls “one of the clearest declarations of divine providence anywhere in Scripture,” Joseph once again (cf. 45:4-9 and comments on) expresses his confidence in God’s sovereign control over what transpired forty years earlier (verse 20; cf. Proverbs 16:9 and 19:21). Though Satan and sinners do their best to make things bad for God’s people, God uses their bad for the believer’s good (Romans 8:28).<sup>615</sup> Genesis 50:20 is a verse worth committing to memory and one that Walton (*Genesis*, p. 723) contends is the conclusion to the book, adding: “God’s revelation of his mastery and control of his creation is the message of Genesis.” It is also a verse that points to Christ, as Hughes (p. 577) suggests: “Christ suffered far more evil in his life on earth than did Joseph, and in his death the

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some last statement about Joseph’s need to pardon his brothers. The evidence favors the first possibility, since such an instruction from Jacob is nowhere earlier recorded. Nor has there been even a hint of Jacob’s discovery of the brothers’ mistreatment of Joseph. Also, the brothers have done little over the last number of years to lend credibility to their speech. If they misstate the truth at the beginning to Jacob (ch. 37), what is to prevent them from misstating the truth about Jacob at the end? And why would Jacob share this with them, and not directly with Joseph?” Mathews (2:925), however, seems to suggest otherwise: “As to whether the brothers fabricated this story, we can’t judge other than by Joseph’s apparent acceptance of it.”

<sup>613</sup> Commenting on the Hebrew word translated “trespass” in verse 17, Hamilton (2:704) states: “This is the word for sinful action in its most transparent manifestation. It is revolt and rebellion.”

<sup>614</sup> Why Joseph’s sorrow? Hamilton (2:704) comments: “Is he distressed, after all he had done for his brothers, that they still perceive him as a potential killer, and as one who thrives on retribution? Has the recall of the lately departed father brought up Joseph’s grief again? Is he just sad, or is he relieved that they finally confess?” Hamilton (*ibid.*) gives his reason, quoting M. Sternberg in the process: “I am inclined to believe that one must understand this verse by seeing it as a sequel to the event narrated in 45:1f. .... ‘It is as though the whole ordeal has been in vain: if they have learned anything about him beyond externals—and the fear may well have haunted them all those years—the effect has evaporated.’ Hence, Joseph’s tears.”

<sup>615</sup> “... [W]hatever poison Satan produces, God turns it into medicine for his elect” (Calvin, 2:488).

wickedness of us all fell upon him, 'but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive.'

### **50:22-26**

The final five verses of Genesis fast-forward 54 years<sup>616</sup> to Joseph's final days on earth. Joseph spends the final 93 years of his life in Egypt (verse 22; cf. 39:2). He lives long enough to see his great-grandsons<sup>617</sup>, some of whom (like Jacob in 48:5) he adopts (verse 23).<sup>618</sup> Ironically, one of Joseph's grandsons is named Machir (verse 23), which means "one who is sold" (Hamilton, 2:711). Just prior to his death, Joseph expresses his faith in God's provision ("God will surely visit<sup>619</sup> you," verse 24) and promise ("and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob," verse 24; cf. Deuteronomy 6:10 and Hebrews 11:22). In keeping with the latter, Joseph (like Jacob in 47:29-31 and 49:29-32) makes his brothers promise<sup>620</sup> to carry his body<sup>621</sup> from Egypt to Canaan when the 400-year sojourn in Egypt is complete (verse 25; cf. Exodus 13:19, Joshua 24:32, and Hebrews 11:22). Joseph dies at the age of 110, the ideal age according to Egyptians (Davis, p. 304; Hamilton, 2:709), is embalmed (presumably by the Egyptians<sup>622</sup>), and is buried in Egypt (verse 26).

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<sup>616</sup> This figure is derived as follows: Joseph 39 years old when he sees his father after their 22-year separation (see footnote 553). Joseph 56 years old when his father dies (17 years derived from 47:28). Joseph dies at 110 (50:22 and 26). Thus, there are 54 years between the death of Jacob and the death of Joseph.

<sup>617</sup> "To see one's (grand)children is the crowning joy of a full life (Ps. 128:6; Prov. 17:6; Isa. 53:10)" (Hamilton, 2:710).

<sup>618</sup> "Brought up upon Joseph's knees" in verse 23 signifies adoption (Hamilton, 2:710; cf. 30:3 and footnote 366).

<sup>619</sup> On this verb, see comments on 21:1 and footnote 259.

<sup>620</sup> Commenting on verse 25, Hamilton (2:711) states: "Jacob made his request with [the Hebrew verb *sawa*] ('instructed, ordered'). Joseph uses a stronger verb ([*saba*], 'to put under oath, swear'), perhaps because of lingering suspicions he has about his brothers' integrity."

<sup>621</sup> "Bones" in verse 25 is a synecdoche for "body" or "corpse" (Hamilton, 2:708). A synecdoche is a figure of speech whereby (in this case) a part stands for the whole.

<sup>622</sup> Like Jacob (see comments on 50:2), Joseph was very likely mummified. If so, it is quite possible that his body has been preserved even to this day. Davis (p. 304) states in this regard: "The very possibility that Jacob and Joseph were mummified makes it a distinct possibility that their bodies are in an excellent state of preservation and can be recovered. Such intriguing prospects as this keep the archaeologist going."