

Notes on Genesis

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Introduction

TITLE

Each book of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament, called the Torah [instruction] by the Jews) originally received its title in the Hebrew Bible from the first word or words in the book.¹ The Hebrew word translated "in the beginning" is *beresit*. The English title "Genesis," however, has come to us from the Latin Vulgate translation of Jerome (*Liber Genesis*). The Latin title came from the Septuagint translation (the Greek translation of the Old Testament made about 300 years before Christ). "Genesis" is a transliteration of the Greek word *geneseos*, the Greek word that translates the Hebrew *toledot*. This Hebrew word is the key word in identifying the structure of Genesis, and the translators have usually rendered it "account" or "generations" (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2).

DATE

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

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

Most evangelicals who take the Scriptures seriously believe that the earth is not much older than 10,000 years. They base this on the genealogies in Scripture (Gen. 5; 10; 11; et al.), which they understand to be "open" (i.e., not complete). Evangelicals usually hold to a more recent date for man's creation, also for the same reason.

A smaller group of evangelicals believes that the genealogies are either "closed" (i.e., complete) or very close to complete. This leads us to date the creation of the world and man about 6,000 years ago.²

¹There are three divisions in the Hebrew Bible: The Law (Torah), the Prophets, and the Writings. The Torah was originally one book, but the Septuagint divided it into the five books that we have. The Jews regarded the stories in the Torah as divine instruction for them as well as the commandments and sermons since they too teach theology and ethics.

²I shall discuss the question of how we should interpret the genealogies in the exposition of the chapters where they occur.

Liberal interpreters have placed the date of composition of Genesis much later than Moses' lifetime.

If one accepts Mosaic authorship, as most conservative evangelicals do, the date of composition of Genesis must be within Moses' lifetime (ca. 1525-1405 B.C.). This book was perhaps originally intended to encourage the Israelites to trust in their faithful, omnipotent God as they anticipated entrance into the Promised Land from Kadesh Barnea or from the Plains of Moab.³ Moses may have written it earlier to prepare them for the Exodus,⁴ but this seems less likely.

WRITER

The authorship of the Pentateuch has been the subject of great controversy among professing Christians since Spinoza introduced "higher criticism" of the Bible in the seventeenth century. The "documentary hypothesis," which developed from his work, is that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, as most scholars in Judaism and the church until that day believed. Instead, it was the product of several writers who lived much later than Moses. A redactor (editor) or redactors combined these several documents into the form we have now. These documents (J, E, D, P, and others) represent a Yahwistic tradition, an Elohist tradition, a Deuteronomistic tradition, a Priestly tradition, etc.⁵

The evidence that Moses wrote the Pentateuch is conclusive if one believes that Jesus Christ spoke the truth when He attributed authorship to Moses (Matt. 19:8; Mark 7:10; Luke 16:29-31; 20:37; 24:27; John 7:19, 22; cf. Acts 15:1).⁶ Jesus Christ did not specifically say that Moses wrote Genesis, but in our Lord's day the Jews regarded the Pentateuch (Torah) as a whole unit. They recognized Moses as the author of all five books. Consequently they would have understood what Jesus said about any of the five books of Moses as an endorsement of the Mosaic authorship of them all.⁷

³Eugene H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 30. See Walther Zimmerli, "Abraham," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 6 (1978):49-60.

⁴E.g., Kenneth Kitchen, "The Old Testament in its Context: 1 From the Origins to the Eve of the Exodus," *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* 59 (1971):9.

⁵You can learn more about this influential theory by studying the subject of Old Testament Introduction. For a good survey of the history of scholarly opinion, see Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, pp. 15-18; R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, pp. 12-27; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1—11:26*, pp. 63-85; or Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. xxv-xlii.

⁶The New Testament writers quoted or alluded to Genesis over 60 times in 17 books.

⁷Oswald T. Allis' *The Five Books of Moses* is a classic rebuttal of the denial that Moses wrote all five books. No one has discredited it, though liberal scholars have ignored it. More recently, Kenneth Kitchen's series of six articles, "The Old Testament in its Context" in *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* (1971-72), especially the sixth article, refuted "the fashionable myth" (p. 9) of the evolution of Israel's religion as proposed by Julius Wellhausen and his followers. Another excellent rebuttal by a Jewish scholar, Umberto Cassuto, is his *The Documentary Hypothesis*. For a review of other subsequent approaches scholars have pursued in the study of Genesis (i.e., the form-critical, tradition-historical, and rhetorical-critical), see Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, pp. 27-35. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1—17*, pp. 11-38, also gave such an overview.

SCOPE

The events recorded in Genesis stretch historically from Creation to Joseph's death, a period of at least 2500 years. The first part of the book (ch. 1—11) is not as easy to date precisely as the second part (ch. 12—50). The history of the patriarchs recorded in this second main division of the text covers a period of about 300 years.

The scope of the book progressively and consistently narrows. The selection of content included in Genesis points to the purpose of the divine author: to reveal the history of and basic principles involved in God's relationship with people.⁸

PURPOSE

Genesis provides the historical basis for the rest of the Bible and the Pentateuch, particularly the Abrahamic Covenant. Chapters 1—11 give historical background essential to understanding that covenant, and chapters 12—50 record the covenant and its initial outworking. The Abrahamic Covenant continues to be the basic arrangement by which God operates in dealing with humanity throughout the Pentateuch and the rest of the Bible.

"The real theme of the Pentateuch is the selection of Israel from the nations and its consecration to the service of God and His Laws in a divinely appointed land. The central event in the development of this theme is the divine covenant with Abraham and its . . . promise to make his offspring into the people of God and to give them the land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance."⁹

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

"Two opposite progressions appear in this prologue [chs. 1—11]: (a) God's orderly Creation with its climax in His blessing of man, and (b) the totally disintegrating work of sin with its two greatest curses being the Flood and the dispersion at Babel.¹⁰ The first progression demonstrates God's plan to bring about perfect order from the beginning in spite of what the reader may know of man's experience. The second progression demonstrates the great need of God's intervention to provide the solution for the corrupt human race."¹¹

THEOLOGY

The hero of Genesis is the LORD God, and its stories deal with the origin and life of the believing community under His sovereignty.

⁸See the chart "Chronology of Genesis," in John Davis, *From Paradise to Prison*, p. 29.

⁹Moses H. Segal, *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Its Authorship and Other Biblical Studies*, p. 23.

¹⁰Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 13.

¹¹Ross, "Genesis," p. 21.

"The subject matter of the theology in Genesis is certainly God's work in establishing Israel as the means of blessing the families of the earth. This book forms the introduction to the Pentateuch's main theme of the founding of the theocracy, that is, the rule of God over all Creation. It presents the origins behind the founding of the theocracy: the promised blessing that Abraham's descendants would be in the land.

"Exodus presents the redemption of the seed out of bondage and the granting of a covenant to them. Leviticus is the manual of ordinances enabling the holy God to dwell among His people by making them holy. Numbers records the military arrangement and census of the tribes in the wilderness, and shows how God preserves His promised blessings from internal and external threats. Deuteronomy presents the renewal of the covenant.

"In the unfolding of this grand program of God, Genesis introduces the reader to the nature of God as the sovereign Lord over the universe who will move heaven and earth to establish His will. He seeks to bless mankind, but does not tolerate disobedience and unbelief. Throughout this revelation the reader learns that 'without faith it is impossible to please God' (Heb. 11:6)."¹²

OUTLINE

The structure of Genesis is very clear. The phrase "the generations of" (*toledot* in Hebrew, from *yalad* meaning "to bear, to generate") occurs ten times (really eleven times since 36:9 repeats 36:1), and in each case it introduces a new section of the book.¹³ The first part of Genesis is introductory and sets the scene for what follows. An outline of Genesis based on this structure is as follows.

1. Introduction 1:1—2:3
2. The generations of heaven and earth 2:4—4:26
3. The generations of Adam 5:1—6:8
4. The generations of Noah 6:9—9:29
5. The generations of the sons of Noah 10:1—11:9
6. The generations of Shem 11:10-26
7. The generations of Terah 11:27—25:11
8. The generations of Ishmael 25:12-18
9. The generations of Isaac 25:19—35:29
10. The generations of Esau 36:1-43
11. The generations of Jacob 37:1—50:26

¹²Ibid., p. 26.

¹³For an extended discussion of the structure of Genesis based on the occurrences of *toledot*, see Mathews, pp. 25-41; or Ross, "Genesis," pp. 22-26.

A full expository outline designed to highlight the relative emphases of the book follows. We shall follow this outline in these notes as we seek to unpack the message of the book.

- I. Primeval events 1:1—11:26
 - A. The story of creation 1:1—2:3
 - 1. An initial statement of creation 1:1
 - 2. Conditions at the time of creation 1:2
 - 3. The six days of creation 1:3-31
 - 4. The seventh day 2:1-3
 - B. What became of the creation 2:4—4:26
 - 1. The garden of Eden 2:4—3:24
 - 2. The murder of Abel 4:1-16
 - 3. The spread of civilization and sin 4:17-26
 - C. What became of Adam 5:1—6:8
 - 1. The effects of the curse on humanity ch. 5
 - 2. God's sorrow over man's wickedness 6:1-8
 - D. What became of Noah 6:9—9:29
 - 1. The Flood 6:9—8:22
 - 2. The Noahic Covenant 9:1-17
 - 3. The curse on Canaan 9:18-29
 - E. What became of Noah's sons 10:1—11:9
 - 1. The table of nations ch. 10
 - 2. The dispersion at Babel 11:1-9
 - F. What became of Shem 11:10-26
- II. Patriarchal narratives 11:27—50:26
 - A. What became of Terah 11:27—25:11
 - 1. Terah and Abraham's obedience 11:27—12:9
 - 2. Abram in Egypt 12:10-20
 - 3. Abram's separation from Lot ch. 13
 - 4. Abram's military victory ch. 14
 - 5. The Abrahamic covenant ch. 15
 - 6. The birth of Ishmael ch. 16
 - 7. The sign of circumcision ch. 17
 - 8. Yahweh's visit to Abraham 18:1-15
 - 9. Abraham's intercession for Lot 18:16-33
 - 10. The destruction of Sodom ch. 19

11. Abraham's sojourn at Gerar ch. 20
 12. The birth of Isaac 21:1-21
 13. Abimelech's treaty with Abraham 21:22-34
 14. The sacrifice of Isaac 22:1-19
 15. The descendants of Nahor 22:20-24
 16. The purchase of Sarah's tomb ch. 23
 17. The choice of a bride for Isaac ch. 24
 18. Abraham's death 25:1-11
- B. What became of Ishmael 25:12-18
- C. What became of Isaac 25:19—35:29
1. Isaac's twin sons 25:19-26
 2. The sale of the birthright 25:27-34
 3. Isaac and Abimelech 26:1-11
 4. Isaac's wells 26:12-33
 5. Jacob's deception for Isaac's blessing 26:34—28:9
 6. Jacob's vision at Bethel 28:10-22
 7. Jacob's marriages and Laban's deception 29:1-30
 8. Jacob's mishandling of God's blessings 29:31—30:24
 9. Jacob's new contract with Laban 30:25-43
 10. Jacob's flight from Haran ch. 31
 11. Jacob's attempt to appease Esau 32:1-21
 12. Jacob at the Jabbok 32:22-32
 13. Jacob's meeting with Esau and his return to Canaan ch. 33
 14. The rape of Dinah and the revenge of Simeon and Levi ch. 34
 15. Jacob's return to Bethel ch. 35
- D. What became of Esau 36:1—37:1
- E. What became of Jacob 37:2—50:26
1. God's choice of Joseph 37:2-11
 2. The sale of Joseph into Egypt 37:12-36
 3. Judah and Tamar ch. 38
 4. Joseph in Potiphar's house ch. 39
 5. The prisoners' dreams and Joseph's interpretations ch. 40
 6. Pharaoh's dreams and Joseph's interpretation ch. 41
 7. Joseph's brothers' first journey into Egypt ch. 42
 8. Joseph's brothers' second journey into Egypt ch. 43
 9. Joseph's last test and its results ch. 44
 10. Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers 45:1-15
 11. Israel's move to Egypt 45:16-46:30
 12. Joseph's wise leadership 46:31—47:27

13. Jacob's worship in Egypt 47:28—48:22
14. Jacob's blessing of his sons 49:1-28
15. Deaths and a promise yet to be fulfilled 49:29—50:26¹⁴

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

Exposition

I. PRIMEVAL EVENTS 1:1—11:26

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

"What we find in chaps. 1—11 is the divine initiation of blessing, which is compromised by human sin followed by gracious preservation of the promise: blessing-sin-grace."¹⁵

"His [Moses'] theological perspective can be summarized in two points. First, the author intends to draw a line connecting the God of the Fathers and the God of the Sinai covenant with the God who created the world. Second, the author intends to show that the call of the patriarchs and the Sinai covenant have as their ultimate goal the reestablishment of God's original purpose in Creation."¹⁶

"Evidently an interest in the way in which the world and humankind came into existence and in the history of the earliest times was characteristic of the ancient civilized world. At any rate, various 'origin stories' or 'creation myths' about the activities of a variety of creator-gods are still extant in what remains of the literatures of ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia. But the combination of such accounts with narratives about more recent times testifies to an additional motivation. The aim of such works was to give their readers—or to strengthen—a sense of national or ethnic *identity*, particularly at a time when there was for some reason a degree of uncertainty or hesitation about this. . . .

"The placing of Gen. 1—11 as a prologue to the main body of the work also afforded the opportunity to express certain distinctively Israelite articles of faith which it would have been more difficult to introduce into the later narratives, particularly with regard to the doctrine of God."¹⁷

"Gen 1—11 as we read it is a commentary, often highly critical, on ideas current in the ancient world about the natural and supernatural world. Both individual stories as well as the final completed work seem to be a polemic against many of the commonly received notions about the gods and man. But the clear polemical thrust of Gen 1—11 must not obscure the fact that at certain points biblical and extrabiblical thought are in clear

¹⁵Mathews, p. 60.

¹⁶Sailhamer, p. 19. Cf. Mathews, p. 77.

¹⁷Whybray, pp. 36-37. See Gordon H. Johnston, "Genesis 1 and Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:658 (April-June 2008):178-94. See Steven D. Mathewson, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming Old Testament Narratives," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:616 (October-December 1997):410-35, for help in preaching narrative portions of the Old Testament.

agreement. Indeed Genesis and the ancient Near East probably have more in common with each other than either has with modern secular thought."¹⁸

A. THE STORY OF CREATION 1:1—2:3

God created the entire universe and then formed and filled it in six days. He brought order and fullness for humankind to enjoy and to rule over. He then blessed and set apart the seventh day as a memorial of His creative work.¹⁹ The God of Israel, the deliverer of His people, is the creator of all that exists.

". . . Gen 1:1—2:4a is clearly recognizable as a unit of historical narrative. It has an introduction (1:1), a body (1:2—2:3) and a conclusion (2:4a)."²⁰

"The creation account is theocentric, not creature centered. Its purpose is to glorify the Creator by magnifying him through the majesty of the created order. The passage is doxological as well as didactic, hymnic as well as history. 'God' is the *grammatical* subject of the first sentence (1:1) and continues as the *thematic* subject throughout the account."²¹

1. An initial statement of creation 1:1

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

1. Verse 1 describes an original creation of the universe. God began fashioning the earth as we know it in verse 2 or verse 3. This view may or may not involve a gap in time between verses 1 and 2.²² Some advocates of this view believe that the original creation became chaotic as a result of divine judgment.²³
2. Verse 1 describes part of what God did on the first day of creation (1:1-5). It is a general statement followed by specific details.²⁴

¹⁸Wenham, p. xlvii.

¹⁹Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, has influenced this and subsequent introductory and concluding summaries of the major sections of the text, though I have not always footnoted his views, as I have done here.

²⁰John H. Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes: Genesis 1:1—2:4a," *Trinity Journal* 5 NS (Spring 1984):74. This article outlines some principles to use in finding the writer's intent and purpose in selecting the events he chose to record in historical narratives. It provides an excellent introduction to the interpretation of historical narrative. Historical narrative is one of several biblical types of literature (French *genre*). Other *genre* include genealogy, poetry, epistolary, and apocalyptic.

²¹Mathews, p. 113.

²²Advocates of this view include Kidner; C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, vol. 1; G. H. Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages and Their Connection with Modern Spiritualism and Theosophy*; Thomas Chalmers, *Posthumous Works of the Rev. Thomas Chalmers*, vol. 1; Arthur Custance, *Without Form and Void*; et al.

²³More information on this theory follows in my comments on 1:2.

²⁴Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*; Wenham; John Davis, *From Paradise to Prison*; et al. I prefer this view.

3. Verse 1 describes what God did on the six days of creation (1:2-31). It is a topic sentence that introduces the whole creation account that follows.²⁵

The "beginning" is the beginning of the creation of the cosmos, not the beginning of all things (cf. Mark 1:1; John 1:1). This appears to be clear from the context.

"This verse refers to the beginning of the world as we know it; it affirms that it is entirely the product of the creation of God. But there are two ways that this verse can be interpreted: (1) It may be taken to refer to the original act of creation with the rest of the events on the days of creation completing it. This would mean that the disjunctive clauses of v. 2 break the sequence of the creative work of the first day. (2) It may be taken as a summary statement of what the chapter will record, that is, vv. 3-31 are about God's creating the world as we know it. If the first view is adopted, then we have a reference here to original creation; if the second view is taken, then Genesis itself does not account for the original creation of matter. To follow this view does not deny that the Bible teaches that God created everything out of nothing (cf. John 1:3)—it simply says that Genesis is not making that affirmation. This second view presupposes the existence of pre-existent matter, when God said, 'Let there be light.' The first view includes the description of the primordial state as part of the events of day one. The following narrative strongly favors the second view, for the 'heavens/sky' did not exist prior to the second day of creation (see v. 8) and 'earth/dry land' did not exist, at least as we know it, prior to the third day of creation (see v. 10)."²⁶

The Hebrew word translated "God" (*'elohim*) is a plural noun. The plurality simply adds intensification to the name El, as does the personal pronoun "us" in verse 26.²⁷ The writers of Scripture used it as an honorific title. Though it is a plural in form, it is singular in meaning when referring to the true God. This name represents the Creator's transcendent relationship to His creation.

"The Hebrew word translated 'God' (*'elohim*) may be used as a plural noun and be translated 'gods.' But when this word is used of true God, then it is not a plural but is an intensified noun, exhausting the meaning of the underlying root (*'alah*) which means 'to be powerful.' He 'us.' When used of God, this is not really a plural (despite the common translation); it is a similar intensification of the pronoun which describes God."²⁸

The "heavens and earth" refer to the universe as we know it (i.e., the sky above with all that is in it and the earth below). There is no one word in Hebrew for "universe." This is a

²⁵George Bush, *Notes on Genesis*; Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*; Bruce K. Waltke, *Creation and Chaos*; idem, *Genesis*; Ross; Hamilton; et al.

²⁶The NET Bible note on 1:1.

²⁷Hebrew is the only ancient Semitic language that uses this type of intensification of nouns and pronouns.

²⁸E-mail from Ronald B. Allen, August 31, 2006.

figure of speech (merism) for totality. God created everything. The translators often rendered the Hebrew word *'eres* (earth) as "land." By translating it this way here we can see that Moses wanted his readers to realize that God created and therefore owned all land (cf. 12:7 and all subsequent references to the Promised Land; Ps. 24:1).²⁹

This verse is important because it contradicts six popular philosophies:

1. Atheism—God does exist.
2. Pantheism—God is distinct from His creation.
3. Polytheism—"Created" is singular in the text.³⁰
4. Radical materialism (matter is eternal)—Matter had a supernatural origin (emphasis on origin).
5. Naturalism (evolutionism)—Creation took place when someone outside nature intervened (emphasis on process).
6. Fatalism—A personal God freely chose to create.

God created the universe from nothing (Latin *ex nihilo*). While the text does not state this fact per se, the reader can deduce it from the following evidence. The phrase "in the beginning" implies it as do the Hebrew word for "create" (*bara*) and the expression "formless and void." New Testament passages also support this conclusion (e.g., John 1:3; Rom. 4:17; and Heb. 11:3).³¹

The emphasis in this verse is on the origin of the universe. God created it.³² He alone is eternal, and everything else owes its origin and existence to Him.³³

2. Conditions at the time of creation 1:2

Verse 2 describes the condition of the earth before God prepared it for human beings. Here "earth" refers to the whole planet, though the same English word also refers to the cosmos (when combined with "heaven," v. 1), and to dry land (v. 10).

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

". . . he calls the global ocean (the 'deep') in 1:2 a 'desert.' This is not apparent in the English translation 'formless,' but the NASB notes it in the

²⁹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 19.

³⁰The most obvious difference between the biblical account of creation and those of other ancient Near Eastern cultures is that the biblical account is monotheistic.

³¹See Jack Cottrell, "The Doctrine of Creation from Nothing," *The Seminary Review* 29:4 (December 1983):157-75.

³²Walter C. Kaiser Jr.'s article, "The Literary Form of Genesis 1—11," in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, pp. 48-65, is of great value in understanding and responding to the major critical attacks on Genesis 1—11.

³³Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 20.

margin as a 'wasteland.' . . . Moses uses this term (Deut 32:10) to describe the desert wasteland where Israel wandered for forty years. Why call an ocean a desert? What better way to teach the people that the God who will lead them out of the *wilderness* and give them the promised *land* is the same God who once prepared the *land* for them by dividing the *waters* and producing the 'dry land'? The God of the Pentateuch is One who leads his people from the wasteland to the promised land."³⁴

Scholars of a more liberal persuasion typically believe that references to the Spirit of God in the Old Testament indicate the power or influence of God, not the third person of the Trinity. Some conservative scholars believe that, though the Spirit was really the third person of the Trinity, people living during the Old Testament period did not associate the Spirit with God Himself. They thought of the Spirit as a power or influence of God. However there are several indications in the Old Testament that informed Israelites identified the Spirit with God (cf. Gen. 1:2; 2 Kings 2:9; Ps. 104:30; Ezek. 3:12-14; 11:1; Zech. 4:6).³⁵

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

Here we learn that the earth was "formless and empty" (a hendiadys meaning thoroughly disorganized, unproductive, and uninhabited) before God graciously prepared it for human habitation (cf. Jer. 4:23-27).³⁶ Moses pictured the Spirit as a wind—the words are identical in Hebrew—moving over the unorganized creation. As God did His work of creating by means of His Spirit, so believers are to do our work by His Spirit.

"Hitherto all is static, lifeless, immobile. Motion, which is the essential element in change, originates with God's dynamic presence."³⁷

Verse 2 seems to me to describe conditions that existed on earth *when* God created it originally. Whereas verse 1 explains the origin of the universe, verse 2 pictures its original condition. Verses 3-31 describe this original condition in more detail and explain the process of creation by which God formed what was formless and filled what was void.

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

THE GAP THEORY

Statement: The *classic* statement of this theory contains the following ideas, though there have been many variations on this theory.

³⁴Idem, "Exegetical Notes . . .," pp. 80-81.

³⁵See Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, and idem, *The Prophets of Israel*, pp. 85-87.

³⁶See D. T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2*, pp. 42-43. A hendiadys is a figure of speech in which the writer expresses a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and" rather than by using an adjective and a substantive.

³⁷Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 7.

1. There is an indefinite time gap (hence the name of the theory) between 1:1 and 1:2.
2. Verse 1 reveals the creation of a perfect heaven and earth very different from what we see around us now.
3. A preadamite race of humans inhabited this original creation.
4. Lucifer (unfallen Satan), whose "headquarters" was in the Garden of Eden, ruled over this race of people.
5. When Lucifer rebelled—many advocates see this in Isaiah 14—sin entered the world.
6. Part of God's judgment of this rebellion was the destruction of the earth with a flood (in Noah's day) followed by a global ice age, which accounts for the fossils.³⁸

History: This is a very old theory that certain early Jewish writers and some church fathers held. Thomas Chalmers propelled it into prominence in 1814.³⁹ Chalmers' purpose was to harmonize Scripture with Scripture, not Scripture with science.⁴⁰ Darwin's *Origin of Species* first appeared in 1859, but Chalmers published his theory in 1814. Franz Delitzsch supported it in 1899.⁴¹ G. H. Pember's book *Earth's Ancient Ages* (1907) gave further impetus to this view. Many Christian geologists favored the view because they saw in it "an easy explanation for the fossil strata."⁴² Harry Rimmer supported it⁴³ as did Arthur W. Pink.⁴⁴ L. S. Chafer held it⁴⁵ but did not emphasize it. Arthur Custance is one writer who has defended it fairly recently.⁴⁶

Arguments and Responses:

1. The first word in verse 2 (*waw*, "and") is a conjunction that indicates consecutive occurrences. It introduces something that happened after what precedes. **Response.** The verb tense and word order in this sentence do not permit this use of this conjunction (vv. 1-2). Rather here, as is normal, the conjunction indicates a break in the consecutive order of events and introduces a circumstantial (independent) clause (v. 2) that describes something in a preceding clause (v. 1). A better translation of the *waw* would be "now." In short, the Hebrew grammar does not allow for a chronological gap between verses 1 and 2.
2. The verb (*hayata*, "was") can and should read "became." The translators have rendered it this way in many other places in the Old Testament. **Response.** This is a legitimate translation, but "became" is not always the best translation (cf. Jonah 3:3; Zech. 3:3). Here the translation should be "was."

³⁸For a creationist explanation of the ice ages, see Ken Ham, Andrew Snelling, and Carl Wieland, *The Answers Book*, pp. 12-13, 77-87.

³⁹See his *Daily Scripture Readings*, 1:1.

⁴⁰Waltke, *Creation and . . .*, p. 20.

⁴¹Franz Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology*, p. 74-76.

⁴²John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood*, p. 92.

⁴³*Modern Science and the Genesis Record*, 1941.

⁴⁴*Gleanings in Genesis*, 1922

⁴⁵*Systematic Theology*, 1947-48, 6:67.

⁴⁶*Without Form and Void*, 1970.

3. The chaos (*tohu wa bohu*, "waste and void," perhaps another hendiadys) describes an evil condition (cf. Isa. 24:1; 45:18; Jer. 4:23). **Response.** This is usually the case, but not always (cf. Deut. 32:10; Job 6:18; 12:24; 26:7; Ps. 107:40). It is not so here.
4. "Darkness" is a symbol of evil in Scripture (cf. 1 John 1:5). This supports the badness of the condition that resulted from Satan's rebellion. **Response.** This is true in some cases, but not always (cf. Ps. 104:19-24). Consider too that evening was part of the days God declared good.
5. The two primary words for "create" (*bara* and *asah* used respectively in 1:1 and 1:25) refer to two different kinds of creativity. *Bara* usually refers to primary creative activity. Since Moses used *bara* in 1:1 this was the original creation and not just a general description of the process that follows (in 1:3-5 or 1:3-31). If 1:1 was a general description he would have used *asah* since some of what God created in the six days He formed out of previously existing material (e.g., man and woman). **Response.** These two words are not so distinct. For example, Moses used *bara* of the creation of man out of previously existing material (1:27), and he used *asah* of the whole creation as the primary creative activity of God (Exod. 20:11). Furthermore, he used *bara* of the creation of some animals (1:21) and *asah* of the creation of other animals (1:25). The real difference between these two words is that Moses used *bara* only of divine activity and he used *asah* of both divine and human activities.⁴⁷ Thus, *bara* and *asah* are very close together in meaning. We cannot distinguish them on the basis of *bara* describing primary creative activity and *asah* referring to the reforming of previously existing material.
6. Adam was to "replenish" the earth (1:28, AV) implying a previous race. **Response.** The Hebrew word used means "fill," not "refill." Many modern translations so render it.

Summary: Though many evangelicals still hold the gap theory, very few Hebrew scholars do because the Hebrew grammar does not favor a chronologically sequential reading of verses 1 and 2. Rather, verse 2 in some way describes verse 1.⁴⁸

THE NO-GAP THEORY

The crux of the 1:2 interpretive problem lies in the identification of the chaos (*tohu wa bohu*, "formless and void") mentioned. There have been three primary views concerning the chaos referred to in this verse.

⁴⁷See Thomas J. Finley, "Dimensions of the Hebrew Word for 'Create' (*bara*)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:592 (October-December 1991):409-23.

⁴⁸For a good explanation of the gap theory, as well as the atheistic evolution, theistic evolution, progressive creation, and fiat creation views, see James M. Boice, *Genesis*, 1:37-68. See also Henry M. Morris, "The Gap Theory," *Creation Ex Nihilo* 10:1 (December 1987-February 1988):35-37; and Ham, et al., pp. 16, 157-75.

1. The chaos was a condition that resulted *after* God judged the earth that He had originally created.⁴⁹

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

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

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

2. The chaos was the condition that characterized the earth *when* God created it.⁵⁰

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

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

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

3. The chaos existed *before* God began creating.⁵¹

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

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

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

". . . the disjuncture at v 2 is employed by the author to focus his creation account upon the *land*."⁵²

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

⁴⁹Chalmers, Keil and Delitzsch, Pember, Scofield, Custance, et al., favored this interpretation.

⁵⁰Luther; Young; Davis; Ross; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 29; Mark F. Rooker, "Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or Re-Creation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:595 (July-September 1992):316-23; and 596 (October-December 1992):411-27; Targum Neofiti; et al.; favored this view. See Gary Anderson, "The Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 in the Targums," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52:1 (January 1990):23. The Targums are expanded translations of the Old Testament made during the Babylonian captivity in the Aramaic language.

⁵¹Bush; Waltke, *Creation and . . .*; idem, *Genesis*; Ross; Sailhamer, "Genesis;" et al.; advocated this view.

⁵²Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes . . .," p. 77.

1. View 2 above: God created the earth in a formless and void state. He then proceeded to give it form and to fill it.⁵³

"We would affirm that the first verse serves as a broad comprehensive statement of the fact of creation. Verse two describes the earth as it came from the hands of the Creator and as it existed at the time when God commanded the light to shine forth. The first recorded step in the process of fashioning the earth into the form in which it now appears was God's remarkable utterance, 'Let there be light' [verse 3]."⁵⁴

Problem: It seems unusual that God would create the earth formless and then form it. It seems more likely and consistent with His activity in 1:3-31 that He would create it fully formed.

Answer: The whole process of creation in 1:3-31 is a movement from a more primitive to a more advanced stage of existence.

2. View 3 above: Before God created the earth there was nothing where it now exists, and verse 2 describes that nothingness.⁵⁵

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

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

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

Cosmic order consists of clearly demarcating the various elements of the universe. God divided light and darkness, waters and dry land, the world above from the world below. Likewise people should maintain the other divisions in the universe.⁵⁶ In three days God made the uninhabitable earth productive, and in three more days He filled the uninhabited earth with life. The process of creation, as Moses described it, typically follows this pattern for each day of creation: announcement, commandment, separation, report, naming, evaluation, and chronological framework.⁵⁷

⁵³Young, et al. I prefer this view.

⁵⁴Young, p. 14.

⁵⁵Waltke, et al.

⁵⁶See Mathews, p. 124.

⁵⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 56. Gorman Gray, *The Age of the Universe: What Are the Biblical Limits?*, sought to retain six literal days of creation and to harmonize them with an old age earth model, allowing a long period of time (possibly billions of years) between Gen. 1:2 and 3. However, this explanation does violence to the Hebrew text. For a critique of this book, see Douglas C. Bozzung, "An Evaluation of the Biosphere Model of Genesis 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:648 (October-December 2005):406-23.

The first day 1:3-5

1:3 The world came into being by God's word (cf. Ps. 33:9; Heb. 11:3). Each of the six creative days began with God speaking.⁵⁸ Jesus Christ, the Word of God, was the Creator (John 1:3). The theme of God's word (spoken, written, or incarnate) continues through the Bible. His word is consistently powerful, as here. *Fiat* (the Latin word for "Let there be") creation means creation that came into being by God's word.

"The idea of creation by the word preserves first of all the most radical essential distinction between Creator and creature. Creation cannot be even remotely considered an emanation from God . . . but is rather a product of his personal will."⁵⁹

The "light" might not have been sunlight (cf. v. 14). Perhaps it came from a source fixed at a distance from the earth such as the shekinah, the light that manifests God's glory (cf. Rev. 22:5).⁶⁰ Perhaps God created the sun on the first day, but it became visible on the fourth day.⁶¹ Another view is that God created the sun, moon, and stars on the first day and assigned them their specific functions on the fourth day (cf. vv. 14-18).⁶²

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

Moses presented God as knowing what was good for man (wise) and as providing that for him (loving). In this way he prepared the reader for the tragedy of the Fall (ch. 3).

1:5 God named things as well as creating them. Having a name equals having existence, in biblical thought, and the act of giving a name meant the exercise of a sovereign right (cf. 41:45; 2 Kings 24:17; Dan. 1:7). In this chapter naming or blessing follows some act of creation seven times.

The terms day, night, evening, and morning imply the beginning of the earth's rotation on the first day.⁶³ The Jews reckoned the beginning of a day with the evening rather than the morning. The use of the Hebrew word

⁵⁸God's ten pronouncements in this chapter anticipate His ten commandments at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 20:2-17). All but one of Jesus Christ's miracles occurred immediately after He spoke. The exception occurs in Luke 8:25 when He laid His hands on a blind man.

⁵⁹Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 51-52.

⁶⁰Hamilton, p. 121.

⁶¹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 26.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁶³See my further comments on 2:3.

'*ehad* ("one" day, cf. "second day," "third day," etc.) as an ordinal number also supports this view.⁶⁴

"A few years ago in England some Christians became excited about the Big Bang theory, thinking that it favored Christianity. But they really missed the point—either the point of Scripture or the Big Bang theory or both. The simple fact is that what is given in Genesis 1:1 has no relationship to the Big Bang theory—because from the scriptural viewpoint, the primal creation goes back beyond the basic material or energy. We have a new thing created by God out of nothing [Lat. *ex nihilo*] by fiat, and this is the distinction."⁶⁵

Nevertheless, though it is not the same, "The Big Bang theory sounds very much like the story that the Old Testament has been telling a long time."⁶⁶

From the beginning God made divisions. He later divided the holy from the profane, the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, and Israel from the nations. This shows His sovereignty (i.e., ultimate authority).

The second day 1:6-8

- 1:6 The "expanse" refers to the heavenly vault above the earth. Moses called it the "firmament" (AV) or "sky" (NIV). God placed the sun, moon, and stars in it (vv. 16-17).⁶⁷
- 1:7 God separated the waters so some of them remained on the earth and some were above the earth in the atmosphere. Before He made this division there may have been a dense fog over the whole surface of the earth.⁶⁸
- 1:8 "Heaven" is the same as the "expanse." Moses used it here as a general term to describe everything above the earth from man's viewpoint (v. 8).

The third day 1:9-13

- 1:9 "Seas" (Heb. *yammim*) refers broadly to all bodies of water, not just oceans.

⁶⁴See Andrew E. Steinmann, "'*ehad* as an Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1:5," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45:4 (December 2002):577-84. Ordinal numbers express order (e.g., first, second, third, etc.) whereas cardinal numbers are used in counting (e.g., one, two, three, etc.).

⁶⁵Frances Schaeffer, *Genesis in Time and Space*, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁶Lance Morrow, *Time* (Feb. 5, 1979), p. 149.

⁶⁷The ancients grouped the stars and planets together referring to the former as fixed stars and the latter as wandering stars (cf. Jude 13).

⁶⁸See my comments on the "canopy theory" at 2:4-6.

1:10 "Good" indicates beauty as well as purpose and order.⁶⁹ It was only when the land was ready for man that God called it good. This shows God's loving concern for human beings. It was good for people.

The separation of water from the land so that man could enjoy the land prepares us for the stories of the Flood (chs. 6—9) and the Red Sea crossing (Exod. 14—15). God later used the waters as His instrument to judge those who opposed His will. The waters were an obstacle to man's enjoying the land, so God removed them from the land.

1:11 Since God created plants with seeds in them the original creation evidently had the appearance of age. He created trees with rings and Adam an adult.⁷⁰ Why did Moses mention only shrubs and trees that bear seeds and fruits? These are the ones that provide food for man. He created others, of course, but Moses was stressing God's care for man.⁷¹

1:12 "Kind" (Heb. *min*) is not a biologically exact term. It indicates that God created several different families of plants as separate acts of creation (cf. vv. 21, 24-25; 6:20; 7:14; Lev. 11:14-29; Deut. 14:13-18). All plants, therefore, did not evolve from one.⁷²

"With the conclusion of the third day yet another color is added to God's cosmos. To the basic white and black of day and night has been added the blue of sky and sea. Now the canvas is adorned with green. The golden-yellow sun and the reddish human being will complete this rainbow of colors."⁷³

Note that on the first and second days God did one work each day. He created light and the firmament. On the third day He did two works. He created the land and vegetation. Similarly on the fourth and fifth days God did one work. He created the lights' functions on the fourth day and the birds and fish on the fifth day. Then on the sixth day He again did two works. He created the land animals and man.⁷⁴ On the first three days He gave form to what was formless, and on the last three days He filled what was void.

⁶⁹See von Rad, p. 50.

⁷⁰See Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 232-39.

⁷¹Certain feminists have restricted the use of "man" to males, but this is not the primary meaning of the English word. Its primary meaning is "human being" or "human race," according to the standard Oxford dictionaries. Likewise "mankind" normally means "the human race" or "humanity" unless it is in contrast to "womankind." The Hebrew word *adam* also has a broad range of meaning, from "the human race" to "Adam." Consequently I have used these English words trusting that you will interpret them in harmony with their customary meanings.

⁷²See Henry M. Morris, "Looking At The Original Kinds," *Creation Ex Nihilo* 10:4 (November 1988):15-16.

⁷³Hamilton, p. 126.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 125.

"Both vegetation and humanity, symbolizing the fertility of life, were considered pinnacles of creation in the ancient Near East. The first triad [of days] ends climactically with the creation of vegetation; the second, the creation of humanity."⁷⁵

The fourth day 1:14-19

The luminaries served four purposes.

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

"The narrative stresses their function as servants, subordinate to the interests of the earth. . . . This differs significantly from the superstitious belief within pagan religion that the earth's destiny is dictated by the course of the stars."⁷⁶

"Here is a stern warning for our times for any who would seek the stars in charting their lives."⁷⁷

"The term 'signs' has been given special attention by the author elsewhere in the Pentateuch. For example, the so-called 'plagues' of Egypt are, in fact, called 'signs' by the author of the Pentateuch (e.g., Deut 29:2-3). The meaning given this term in the Exod account . . . is that the acts of God in the bringing of disorder upon the Egyptians were 'signs' that God was more powerful and majestic than the Egyptians' gods. This sense of the term 'signs' fits well in Gen 1:14. The author says that not only are the sun and moon to give light upon the land but they are to be visual reminders of the power and majesty of God. They are 'signs' of who the God of the covenant is. The [*sic*] are 'telling of the glory of God,' as the psalmist puts it (Ps 19:1). Not only does the term 'signs' serve as a reminder of the greatness and glory of God for the author of the Pentateuch, 'signs' are also a frequent reminder in the Pentateuch of his grace and mercy (Gen 4, 9, 17)."⁷⁸

Why did Moses use the terms greater and lesser lights to describe the sun and moon (v. 16)? He probably did so because these Hebrew words, which are very similar in other

⁷⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 36.

⁷⁶Mathews, p. 154.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 155.

⁷⁸Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes . . .," p. 79. Moses did not mean that they were the signs of the zodiac or astrological signs.

Semitic languages, are also the names of pagan gods.⁷⁹ He wanted the Israelites to appreciate the fact that their God had created the entities their pagan neighbors worshipped as gods.

"This, the fourth day, is the only day on which no divine word subsequent to the fulfillment is added. On days 1-3 this divine word names the created objects (vv 5, 8, 10); on days 5-6 the creatures are blessed (vv 22, 28). The omission may be just elegant stylistic variation, or it may be a deliberate attempt to avoid naming 'sun' and 'moon' with their connotations of deity."⁸⁰

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

"They [the sun and moon] were not mere lights or reminders of God's glory, they were, as well, calendars for the celebration of the covenant. The world is made for the [Mosaic] covenant. Already at creation, the land was being prepared for the covenant."⁸¹

The writer's perspective throughout is geocentric rather than heliocentric. He used phenomenological language (of appearance) that is very common in the Old Testament. Even modern scientific textbooks use such language without fear of being criticized as unscientific when they refer to sunrise, sunset, etc. Probably God created light on the first day (v. 3), but then on the fourth day the sun, moon, and stars appeared distinctly for the first time.⁸²

Creationists have proposed several solutions to the problem of how light from stars that are millions of light years away could get to Adam if the universe was only days old. These explanations are too involved to discuss here, but I have included some sources for further study in the following footnote.⁸³ I think the best explanation is the appearance of age. As God created humans, plants, and animals fully formed, so He created the light from distant stars already visible on the earth.

The fifth day 1:20-23

"Great sea monsters" (Heb. *tauninim*, v. 21) were large fish, whales, squid, and all large creatures living in the water. The pagans worshipped these, but they were under God's authority. The Old Testament writers adopted pagan imagery, but not pagan theology.

⁷⁹Hamilton, p.127. See G. Hasel, "The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974):81-102.

⁸⁰Wenham, p. 23.

⁸¹Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes . . .," p. 80.

⁸²Idem, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 93.

⁸³D. Russell Humphreys, *Starlight and Time*, discussed five creationist models. See also Ham, et al., pp. 18, 187-95; "Distant Starlight' Not a Problem for a Young Universe" DVD featuring Dr. Jason Lisle.

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

"The blessing of God is one of the great unifying themes of Genesis. God blesses animals (1:22), mankind (1:28), the Sabbath (2:3), Adam (5:2), Noah (9:1), and frequently the patriarchs (12:3; 17:16, 20, etc.). God's blessing is most obviously visible in the gift of children, as this is often coupled with 'being fruitful and multiplying.' But all aspects of life can express this blessing: crops, family, and nation (Deut 28:1-14). Where modern man talks of success, OT man talked of blessing."⁸⁴

Birds and fish rule their respective realms by multiplying.⁸⁵

The sixth day 1:24-31

1:24-25 "Creature" (Heb. *nephesh*) is usually translated "soul" (e.g., 2:7). This Hebrew word and the English "soul" imply conscious life, in contrast to plants that have unconscious life. So in the sense of having conscious life, animals as well as people have souls.

"Cattle" refers to domesticated animals (that man could tame) and "beasts" to wild animals.

What happened to the dinosaurs? Conservative Bible interpreters generally believe they existed but became extinct before the Flood or probably after it.

"Before the Flood, dinosaurs and man lived together on our planet. Extinction of the great marine reptiles, along with the majority of all other types of sea creature, would have been caused by the violent upheavals of the Flood, many being buried and preserved as fossils."⁸⁶

1:26-27 "Us" is probably a plural of intensification (see my comment on verse 1 above), though some regard it as a plural of self-deliberation (cf. 11:7; Ps. 2:3).⁸⁷ Others believe that God was addressing His heavenly court (cf. Isa. 6:8).⁸⁸ This word involves "in germ" the doctrine of the Trinity. However, we should not use it as a formal proof of the Trinity since this reference by itself does not prove that one God exists in three persons.⁸⁹

⁸⁴Wenham, p. 24.

⁸⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 63.

⁸⁶Ham, et al., p. 10. See also pp. 21-39.

⁸⁷Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1—11: A Commentary*, p. 145.

⁸⁸The NET Bible note on 1:26.

⁸⁹See Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 112; Wenham, pp. 27-27; Oswald Allis, *God Spoke by Moses*, p. 13.

"Although the Christian Trinity cannot be derived solely from the use of the plural, a plurality within the unity of the Godhead may be derived from the passage."⁹⁰

The theological controversy in Moses' day was not between trinitarianism and unitarianism but between one self-existent, sovereign, merciful God and many limited, capricious, often immoral gods.⁹¹

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

"Secondly, in Gen 1, man, the image bearer, is the object of God's blessing. According to the account of creation in Gen 1, the chief purpose of God in creating man is to bless him. The impact of this point on the remainder of the Pentateuch and the author's view of Sinai is clear: through Abraham, Israel and the covenant this blessing is to be restored to all mankind."⁹²

"Man" refers to mankind, not Adam (v. 27). "Them" indicates this generic significance. God created (cf. vv. 1, 2) mankind male and female; they did not evolve from a lower form of life (cf. Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6). Adam was not androgynous (i.e., two individuals joined physically like Siamese twins) or bisexual (i.e., one individual possessing both male and female sexual organs). There is no basis for these bizarre ideas in the text.

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

⁹⁰Mathews, p. 163.

⁹¹Hamilton, p. 133.

⁹²Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes . . .," p. 80.

"By ruling as one, male and female fulfill the purpose of God for which they were created. United as one humanity, male and female are one with God and his heavenly court. And it is this unity between male and female, and between humanity and God, that is destroyed in the Fall described in Genesis 3."⁹³

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

God created man male and female as an expression of His own plurality: "Let *us* make man . . ." God's plurality anticipated man's plurality. The human relationship between man and woman thus reflects God's own relationship with Himself.⁹⁴

"Image" and "likeness" are essentially synonymous terms. Both indicate personality, moral, and spiritual qualities that God and man share (i.e., self-consciousness, God-consciousness, freedom, responsibility, speech, moral discernment, etc.) These distinguish humans from the animals, which have no God-consciousness even though they have conscious life (cf. v. 24). Some writers have called the image of God man's "spiritual personality."⁹⁵ In another sense man *is* the image of God (e.g., he rules and creates [procreates] as God does thus reflecting God).⁹⁶ The Fall marred but did not obliterate the image of God in man.

Does the image of God in man include his body?

"Most theologians have recognized that that [*sic*] we cannot interpret it [i.e., the phrase 'the image of God'] literally—that is, that man's physical being is in the image of God. Such an interpretation should be rejected for at least four reasons. In the first place, we are told elsewhere that God is

⁹³Henry F. Lazenby, "The Image of God: Masculine, Feminine, or Neuter?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:1 (March 1987):67, 66.

⁹⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 38.

⁹⁵Keil and Delitzsch, 1:63. See Wenham, pp. 27-28; Charles Feinberg, "The Image of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:515 (July-September 1972):235-246, esp. p. 237; Boice, pp. 77-79; Mathews, pp. 164-72.

⁹⁶See James Jordan, "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis," *Christianity and Civilization* 3 (Summer 1983):38-80. Please note that I do not agree with all of the observations, interpretations, and applications in this article. See also Merrill, pp. 14-16.

a spirit (John 4:24; Isa. 31:3) and that he is ubiquitous (1 Kgs. 8:27). In the second place, a literal interpretation would leave us with all sorts of bizarre questions. If man's physical being is in the image of God we would immediately wonder what, if any organs, God possesses. Does he have sexual organs, and if so, which? Does he have the form of a man, or of a woman, or both? The very absurdity that God is a sexual being renders this interpretation highly unlikely. Thirdly, it seems unlikely that man's dignity above the rest of the animals (Gen. 9:5 f.; Jas. 3:7-9) is due to his slight physiological differences from them. Is it credible that animals may be killed but that man may not be killed because his stature is slightly different? Finally, a literal interpretation seems not only contradictory to the rest of Scripture, and unlikely, but also inappropriate, Gardener aptly observed: 'But our anatomy and physiology is demanded by our terrestrial habitat, and quite inappropriate to the one who inhabits eternity.' For these reasons, theologians have concluded that the statement in Genesis 1:26-28 must be metaphorical of man's spiritual or immaterial nature."⁹⁷

Verse 27 is the first poem in the Bible. The shift to poetry emphasizes human beings as God's image bearers.

1:28 Note that God's blessing of man finds expression in terms of posterity that connotes the ideas of seed and life, two prominent themes as Genesis and the whole Bible unfold.⁹⁸ God's blessing enables humanity to fulfill its twofold destiny: to procreate in spite of death and to rule in spite of enemies. "Blessing" denotes all that fosters human fertility and assists in achieving dominion.⁹⁹

Interpreters have generally recognized the commands to "be fruitful and multiply" as commands to Adam and Eve (and later to Noah, 9:1) as the heads of the human race, not simply as individuals. That is, God has not charged every human being with begetting children. This seems clear from the fact that God has made many men and women incapable of reproducing.¹⁰⁰ Consequently one should not appeal to this command as a support for the theory that God wants all people to bear as many children as they possibly can. This verse is a "cultural mandate," not an individual mandate.

⁹⁷Bruce K. Waltke, "Reflections from the Old Testament on Abortion," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19:1 (Winter 1976):8. His quotation is from R. F. R. Gardener, *Abortion: The Personal Dilemma*. See also Waltke's helpful discussion of image and likeness in *Genesis*, p. 65-66.

⁹⁸Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 38.

⁹⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁰For a good book on childlessness, see Vicky Love, *Childless Is Not Less*.

"This command, like others in Scripture, carries with it an implicit promise that God will enable man to fulfill it."¹⁰¹

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

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

"Subdue" and "rule," the second aspect of this mandate, imply a degree of sovereignty and control that God delegated to man over nature.¹⁰² This constitutes God's "Magna Charta" for all true scientific and material progress. God commanded Adam and Eve to acquire knowledge so they could master their material environment, to bring all its elements into the service of the human race.

"The dominion which man enjoyed in the Garden of Eden was a direct consequence of the image of God in him."¹⁰³

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

"Our Christian proclamation of hope has antecedents in the theological soil of three divine programmatic expectations first heard in Genesis: (1) God will bless the human family with procreation and dominion (1:26-28); (2) he will achieve victory over mankind's enemy (3:15); and (3) he will bring about both through the offspring of Abraham (12:1-3)—namely, the one man Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁴

We have in this verse the three essential elements of a dispensation: a divine revelation of God's will for human conduct, consequent human

¹⁰¹Wenham, p. 33.

¹⁰²See Eric Sauer, *King of the Earth*. Cf. Heb. 2:8-9.

¹⁰³Davis, p. 81.

¹⁰⁴Mathews, p. 22.

responsibility, and a period of time during which God tests people as to their obedience to this responsibility.¹⁰⁵ The dispensations constitute a progressive, connected revelation of God's dealings with humankind. God gave them to the whole human race or to a part of it, specifically, Israel. They are not separate ways of salvation; in each dispensation man is saved by God's grace through the work of Jesus Christ. Before the Cross, people were saved in prospect of Christ's sacrifice, as on credit so to speak, by believing a revelation given to them by God. After the Cross, people are saved in retrospect of Christ's sacrifice, by believing the revelation that He satisfied God's just demands against sinners. Whereas specific human responsibilities change as divine revelation unfolds and dispensation succeeds dispensation, yet people have a continuing responsibility to live in the light of previous revelation. For example, even though the dispensation of the Mosaic Law has ended, Christians are helped to discharge our responsibilities to God by being aware of what God required of the Israelites under the Law (cf. Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The purpose of each dispensation has been to place people under a specific rule of conduct, not as a condition for salvation but to demonstrate that people always fail to live up to God's standards and so need to accept salvation that God extends to them as a gift. I believe that seven dispensations are distinguishable in Scripture. These are Innocence (Gen. 1:28), Conscience (Gen. 3:7), Human Government (Gen. 8:15), Promise (Gen. 12:1), Law (Exod. 19:1), Church (Acts 2:1), and Kingdom (Rev. 20:4).

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

1:29-31 God gave man authority and responsibility to regulate nature and to advance civilization. Nature was to serve man, not vice versa. This does not give man the right to abuse nature, however.¹⁰⁶ Neither does it justify giving animals and plants the "rights" of human beings.

"Man is the climax of creation, and instead of man providing the gods with food, God provided the plants as food for man (1:29)."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵A dispensation is a period of time during which God tests man in relation to his obedience to a specific revelation of God's will.

¹⁰⁶See Gina Hens-Piazza, "A Theology of Ecology: God's Image and the Natural World," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13:4 (October 1983):107-110.

¹⁰⁷Wenham, p. xlix.

Verse 29 suggests that man was originally a vegetarian. After the Flood, God told man that he could eat animals (9:3). The animals were evidently also herbivorous at first (v. 30).¹⁰⁸

Verses 27-31 are a general account of human creation. The more detailed account of the creation of Adam and Eve follows in 2:4-25. These two accounts do not necessarily reflect a two-document composition of the creation story, but they illustrate the writer's purpose. In chapter 1 He wanted to emphasize the creation of humankind in the larger context of the cosmic creation.

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

1. **Evolution** (both Darwinian and neo-Darwinian) asserts that all living organisms arose from a single, simple cell through a process that took millions of years. This first cell resulted from the accumulation of chemical and protein elements that came together because of unknown change factors over a long time period. This view contradicts Scripture, and it is not scientifically demonstrable.¹⁰⁹
2. **Theistic evolution** attempts to harmonize Scripture with scientific theories. It holds that God ordered and directed the evolutionary process. This view fails to explain specific statements in the text of Scripture; it accommodates the text to scientific theory. The major problem with this view is that it is not completely true to either science or Scripture but is inconsistent.¹¹⁰
3. **Special creation** asserts that God produced the world and all life forms through a series of supernatural acts. Some special creationists believe He did this in a relatively brief period of time. Others, such as progressive creationists, believe the creation process took thousands of years. This view gives primacy to the text of Scripture and interprets it more literally, historically, and grammatically.¹¹¹

Progressive creationism teaches that God created the universe in several acts of creation that time periods of indefinite duration separated from one another. The

¹⁰⁸See Ham, et al., pp. 29-30.

¹⁰⁹See John C. Hutchison, "Darwin's Evolutionary Theory and 19th-Century Natural Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):334-54.

¹¹⁰Representative evangelicals who hold this view include Kidner; and Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*. See David H. Lane, "Special Creation or Evolution: No Middle Ground," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):11-31; and idem, "Theological Problems with Theistic Evolution," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:602 (April-June 1994):155-74, for refutations of this view.

¹¹¹Representatives include Bush, Davis, Schaeffer, Waltke, Young, et al. See Warren H. Johns, "Strategies for Origins," *Ministry* (May 1981), pp. 26-28, for good brief explanations of the evolutionary theories and eight creationist theories of origins. David L. Willis, "Creation and/or Evolution," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 29:2 (June 1977):68-72, set forth criticisms of both creationism and evolutionism. Every Christian who accepts evolution should read Charles C. Ryrie, "The Bible and Evolution," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:493 (January-March 1967):66-78; and Kenneth A. Ham, *The Lie: Evolution*. See also idem, *Genesis and the Decay of the Nations*, for an explanation of the effects of evolutionary teaching on humanity. Jobe Martin, *The Evolution of a Creationist*, is also helpful.

process of evolution was at work within these eras and accounts for the development of phyla, species, etc.¹¹² The following quotation distinguishes theistic evolution from progressive creationism.

"I do not believe in theistic evolution. Theistic evolution means simply that God guided the evolutionary process so that it is not to be explained on a purely naturalistic basis. It assumes that all living things, including man, are biologically descended from a common ancestor. By contrast with theistic evolution, Scripture indicates that God made different basic kinds of beings and that all existing plants and animals are not descended from a common ancestor."¹¹³

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

4. The seventh day 2:1-3

"2:1-3 echoes 1:1 by introducing the same phrases but in reverse order: 'he created,' 'God,' 'heavens and earth' reappear as 'heavens and earth' (2:1) 'God' (2:2), 'created' (2:3). This chiasmic pattern brings the section to a neat close which is reinforced by the inclusion 'God created' linking 1:1 and 2:3."¹¹⁴

The mood of the narrative also returns to what it was in 1:1-2. Silence and calm prevail again.¹¹⁵

- 2:1 Moses probably meant everything that existed above the earth and on the earth when he wrote "their hosts." The host of heaven usually refers to the stars in the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 4:19) more than the angels (e.g., 1 Kings 22:19), so the sun, moon, and stars are probably in view here.
- 2:2 "Seventh" comes from a Hebrew root meaning "to be full, completed, entirely made up."¹¹⁶ "Rested" means ceased from activity (cf. Exod. 40:33). There is no implication that God felt fatigued by His creative activity and needed to rest. He simply stopped creating.

¹¹²See Hugh N. Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy*. For a critique of the claims in this book, see Mark Van Bebber and Paul S. Taylor, *Creation and Time: A Report on the Progressive Creationist Book by Hugh Ross*.

¹¹³Russell L. Mixer, "A Letter to President Edman, March 26, 1962," *Bulletin of Wheaton College* (May 1962), p. 5. See also Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*; Pattle P. I. Pun, "A Theology of Progressive Creationism," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 39:1 (March 1987):9-19; W. I. LaSor, "Biblical Creationism," *Asbury Theological Journal* 42:2 (1987):7-20.

¹¹⁴Wenham, p. 5.

¹¹⁵Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, p. 9.

¹¹⁶Bush, p. 46.

2:3 God "blessed" the seventh day in that He set it apart as different from the other days of creation. It was a memorial of His creative work. Note the unique threefold repetition of "seventh day," highlighting its special significance.

". . . according to one Babylonian tradition, the seventh, fourteenth, nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of each month were regarded as unlucky: Genesis, however, declares the seventh day of every week to be holy, a day of rest consecrated to God (2:1-3)."¹¹⁷

Note that God did not command Adam to abstain from work on the Sabbath; this came later with the Mosaic Law. However, Scripture does teach the importance of periodic rest (cf. Exod. 20:8-10; 23:10-12; Lev. 25:2, 4; Deut. 15:1-18; Heb. 4:1-11; et al.). Part of bearing the likeness of God involves resting as He did after completing His work.¹¹⁸

"In the first six days space is subdued; on the seventh, time is sanctified. This day is blessed to refresh the earth. It summons humanity to imitate the pattern of labor and rest of the King and so to confess God's lordship and their consecration to him. On this day they cease to subdue the earth."¹¹⁹

The writers of Scripture used the Sabbath to anticipate the hope of Messianic redemption throughout the Old Testament.

In the creation account the Sabbath points forward to the time when God will bring, ". . . a perfect and complete cosmos out of chaos. . . . The weekly rest-experience of the Sabbath [under the Mosaic Law] served to epitomize the future peace and rest of the Messianic age."¹²⁰

The sabbatical and jubilee years in ancient Judaism also pointed to the liberation Messiah would provide for His people.¹²¹

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

¹¹⁷Wenham, pp. xlix-l.

¹¹⁸Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 39.

¹¹⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 67.

¹²⁰Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Sabbatical Typologies of Messianic Redemption," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17:2 (December 1986):155, 165.

¹²¹See John F. Alexander, "Sabbath Rest," *The Other Side* 146 (November 1983): 8-9; and Gerhard Hasel, "The Sabbath in the Pentateuch," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, pp. 21-43.

"The correspondence of the first paragraph, 1:1-2, with 2:1-3 is underlined by the number of Hebrew words in both being multiples of 7. 1:1 consists of 7 words, 1:2 of 14 (7 x 2) words, 2:1-3 of 35 (7 x 5) words. The number seven dominates this opening chapter in a strange way, not only in the number of words in a particular section but in the number of times a specific word or phrase recurs. For example, 'God' is mentioned 35 times, 'earth' 21 times, 'heaven/firmament' 21 times, while the phrases 'and it was so' and 'God saw that it was good' occur 7 times."¹²²

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

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

"The simple fact is that *day* in Hebrew (just as in English) is used in three separate senses: to mean (1) twenty-four hours, (2) the period of light during the twenty-four hours, and (3) an indeterminate period of time. Therefore, we must leave open the exact length of time indicated by *day* in Genesis."¹²³

Moses used "day" these three ways in Genesis 1 and 2: (1) a 12-hour period of daylight (1:5, 14, 16, 18), (2) a 24-hour day (1:14), and (3) the entire six-day period of creation (2:4). There are four major views as to the length of the days of creation.¹²⁴

1. **The literal 24-hour day theory.** The normal conclusion one would most likely draw from the terminology in the text (e.g., evening, morning, day, night, etc.) is that God created the world in six 24-hour days. This view is most consistent with the principles of literal, historical, and grammatical interpretation. The fact that the number of days corresponds to the number of weekdays also favors this view. Furthermore, whenever "day" (*yom*) occurs with a numeral in the Old Testament, as here, it refers to a 24-hour period. Some advocates cite Exodus 20:11 as support also.¹²⁵ The main problem with this view is that the activity of some days (e.g., the sixth) seems to some to require more than 24 hours.¹²⁶

¹²²Wenham, p. 6.

¹²³Schaeffer, p. 57.

¹²⁴A few scholars have argued that the sequence of days is not chronologically ordered at all, e.g., D. A. Sterchi, "Does Genesis 1 Provide a Chronological Sequence?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:4 (December 1996):529-36; M. Throntveit, "Are the Events in the Genesis Account Set Forth in Chronological Order? No," in *The Genesis Debate*, pp. 36-55. They believe that Moses numbered the days on the basis of content rather than sequence in time. This view has not enjoyed wide acceptance. Other scholars (e.g., Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 75-78; H. Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 78) believed there is some dischronologization in the text.

¹²⁵See Ham, et al., pp. 13-14, 89-101.

¹²⁶See Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 109.

2. **The day-age (or geologic day) theory.** This view interprets the terminology less literally and more figuratively. Advocates argue that the events recorded seem to require more than 24-hour days (e.g., v. 12). They also point out that solar days may not have begun until the fourth day. Some advocates of this theory are "theistic evolutionists." Others are "progressive creationists." "Progressive creationists" generally seek to correlate the geologic ages with the six days of creation. The main problem with the day-age theory is that it interprets terms that seem to have obvious literal meaning figuratively.
3. **The literal days with intervening ages theory.** This view regards each day as a time of completion of creation only. It is an attempt to take the "morning and evening" references seriously but still allow the time that seems necessary within the days (e.g., v. 12). It is a combination of the two preceding views. However, it strains the text. Also, Moses could have described this method of creation more clearly than he did if long ages interspersed the six days. Few scholars have adopted this view.
4. **The revelatory day theory.** The least literal interpretation holds that God revealed, rather than accomplished, creation in six days. A major problem with this view is Exodus 20:11 where Moses says God made, not revealed, His creation in six days. A variation of this view understands the days as "structures of a literary framework designed to illustrate the orderly nature of God's creation and to enable the covenant people to mime the Creator."¹²⁷

Presuppositions are extremely important in this controversy. If one believes that scientific "facts" are true, he or she may try to make the Bible fit these. On the other hand, if one believes in an inerrant Bible he or she will give priority to statements in the text. If one believes both are true, he or she will soon learn that both cannot be true. For example, the text says God created the trees before marine life (1:11, 20), but most evolutionists believe that trees developed after marine life. Also, the Bible implies that marine life and birds came into existence about the same time (1:20), but evolutionists hold that they evolved millions of years apart.¹²⁸ No theory explains the conflict between biblical statements and scientific statements adequately. In the end one really comes down to the question, Do I put more confidence in what God says or in what scientists say?¹²⁹ One's presuppositions will also affect whether he or she interprets more or less literally.

Belief in the inerrancy of Scripture does not obviate the problem of the age of the earth, however. Several evangelical scholars who are competent scientists and affirm inerrancy believe the proper interpretation of Scripture results in an old earth model of creation.¹³⁰ Other equally qualified inerrantists see a young earth model in the Bible.¹³¹

¹²⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 61.

¹²⁸See John Klotz, *Modern Science in the Christian Life*, pp. 111-12.

¹²⁹See Duane T. Gish, "Evolution—A Philosophy, Not a Science," *Good News Broadcaster* (March 1984), pp. 34-37.

¹³⁰E.g., Davis Young, *Creation and the Flood and Christianity and the Age of the Earth*; Robert Newman and Herman Eckelmann Jr., *Genesis One and the Origin of the Earth*; and Daniel Wonderly, *God's Time-Records in Ancient Sediments*; Hugh Ross.

¹³¹E.g., John Klotz, *Genes, Genesis, and Evolution*; Robert Kofahl and Kelly Segraves, *The Creation Explanation*; Henry Morris, *Science, Scripture and the Young Earth*; John Whitcomb, *The Early Earth*; and John D. Morris, *The Young Earth*.

"Clearly a difference between these positions at this precise point of the relationship between science and Scripture is clear and unmistakable. The old-earth view is built on the position that an old universe and an old earth is an established factual base. Thus the Bible at the true meaning level *must* be interpreted to show that it is not out of harmony with this *fact*. The young-earth model is based on the position that the *scientific data* used to establish the concept of an old earth can be interpreted differently and that, strictly speaking, there is no need to defend an old earth. Thus the Bible is approached without this *a priori* demand for an old earth, and the differences are markedly clear, in this writer's opinion."¹³²

Evangelicals who believe in a young earth normally do so because they believe that the biblical genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 are complete or very nearly complete. That is the impression the text gives. These genealogies argue for a young earth. I favor the young earth view.¹³³

Where did the names we use for the days of the week come from? They received their names in honor of seven pagan gods whom the ancients associated with the five major planets plus the sun and moon. The names of Germanic (Teutonic) gods replaced those of some Roman gods as time passed. The early church, following Jewish custom, numbered the days of the week to avoid using the names of pagan gods (e.g., Luke 24:1; Acts 20:7).¹³⁴

| Weekday | Teutonic god | Roman god/planet |
|----------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Sunday | | Sun |
| Monday | | Moon |
| Tuesday | Tiw | Mars |
| Wednesday | Woden | Mercury |
| Thursday | Thor | Jupiter (Jove) |
| Friday | Frigg | Venus |
| Saturday | | Saturn |

¹³²Frederic Howe, "The Age of the Earth: An Appraisal of Some Current Evangelical Positions, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):121. Both parts 1 and 2 of this fine article are very helpful. On the importance of having the correct concept of origins, see Ralph E. Ancil, "Is Creation More Than a Biological Model of Origins?" *Creation Social Science and Humanities Review* 5:2 (Winter 1982):3-13. James Barr's article, "Why the World was Created in 4004 B.C.: Archbishop Ussher and Biblical Chronology," *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67:2 (Spring 1985):575-608, gives biographical information about Ussher whose chronology appeared first in the 1701 edition of the AV and later in the margin of the original Scofield Reference Bible. It also contains an explanation of how Ussher arrived at his dates and a table listing the dates of the more important events in Old Testament history contained in Ussher's chronology. See also Ernest Lucas, "Miracles and natural laws," *Christian ARENA* (September 1985):7-10.

¹³³See the Appendix of these notes for a summary of five popular views of Creation.

¹³⁴See David Malcolm, "The Seven-Day Cycle," *Creation Ex Nihilo* 9:2 (March 1987):32-35.

"Though historical and scientific questions may be uppermost in our minds as we approach the text, it is doubtful whether they were in the writer's mind, and we should therefore be cautious about looking for answers to questions he was not concerned with. Genesis is primarily about God's character and his purposes for sinful mankind. Let us beware of allowing our interests to divert us from the central thrust of the book so that we miss what the LORD, our creator and redeemer, is saying to us."¹³⁵

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

"This passage is significant also in the lives of Christians. Above and beyond asserting the fact of creation in much the same way it did for Israel, the passage provides an important theological lesson. The believer enters into a life of Sabbath rest from works and embarks on a life of holiness in that rest. We learn from the creation account (1) that God is a redeeming God who changes darkness to light, death to life, and chaos to blessing; (2) that God is absolutely sovereign over all life and all pagan ideas that would contend for our allegiance; and (3) that God works by His powerful Word—to create, to redeem, and to sanctify. Obedience to His powerful Word, either the written Word, or the living Word, our Savior, will transform believers into His glorious image."¹³⁶

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

Moses described what happened to the creation by recording significant events in the garden of Eden, the murder of Abel, and the family of Cain.

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

¹³⁵Wenham, p. liii.

¹³⁶Ross, *Creation and . . .*, pp. 114-15.

"Yet in this deteriorating life there is a token of grace (4:15) and a ray of hope (man began to call on Yahweh)."¹³⁷

1. The garden of Eden 2:4—3:24

This story has seven scenes that a change in actors, situations or activities identifies.¹³⁸ Moses constructed this section of Genesis in a chiasmic (palistrophic, crossing) structure to focus attention on the central scene, the Fall. The preceding scenes lead up to the Fall, and the following scenes describe its consequences.¹³⁹

- A** Scene 1 (narrative): God is the sole actor, and man is passive (2:4-17).
- B** Scene 2 (narrative): God is the main actor, man plays a minor role, the woman and animals are passive (2:18-25).
- C** Scene 3 (dialogue): The snake and the woman converse (3:1-5).
- D** Scene 4 (narrative): The man and the woman are primary (3:6-8).
- C'** Scene 5 (dialogue): God converses with the man and the woman (3:9-13).
- B'** Scene 6 (narrative): God is the main actor, man plays a minor role, the woman and the serpent are passive (3:14-21).
- A'** Scene 7 (narrative): God is the sole actor, and man is passive (3:22-24).

The story of the Garden of Eden begins with a second, more detailed account of the creation of humankind that Moses gave as an introduction to the Fall and its consequences.

"More light is shed on the relationship between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 by a consideration of a literary structure that occurs throughout the entire book of Genesis: First, less important things are dealt with rapidly, and then the things more important to the central theme of the Bible are returned to and developed more fully."¹⁴⁰

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

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

¹³⁷Ross, "Genesis," p. 24.

¹³⁸For a different narrative analysis, see Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 80-81.

¹³⁹Wenham, p. 50.

¹⁴⁰Schaeffer, pp. 40-41.

Moses identified Yahweh, the God who called Abraham (12:1) and the God who delivered Israel from Egypt (Exod. 3:15), with Elohim, the God who created the cosmos.¹⁴¹

"In Genesis 1 *'elohim* (God) refers to God's transcendence over the world, while in Genesis 2—3 *yhwh* (LORD) speaks of God's immanence with his elect. When the narrator combines the two names, he makes a bold assertion that the Creation God is the Lord of Israel's history. Just as God ordered creation, he orders history. All is under God's sovereign control, guaranteeing that Israel's history will end in triumph, not in tragedy."¹⁴²

The creation of man 2:4-17

2:4 Having related the creation of the universe as we know it, God next inspired Moses to explain for his readers what became of it.¹⁴³ Sin entered it and devastated it.

"The destiny of the human creation is to live in God's world, with God's other creatures, *on God's terms*."¹⁴⁴

The Hebrew word *toledot* occurs first in 2:4 where it introduces the next section of the book. This Hebrew word often reads "generations," "histories," "descendants," or, as here (in the NASB and NIV), "account." The word summarizes what follows in the section and introduces what became of something, in this case the universe, or, more often, someone. The person mentioned after *toledot* is not usually the central figure in the section but the person who originated what follows. The *toledot* statements contribute the major structural and conceptual framework for the whole Book of Genesis.¹⁴⁵

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

¹⁴¹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 20.

¹⁴²Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 34.

¹⁴³The differences between 1:1—2:3 and 2:4-25 have led many literary critics of the Bible to insist that two different writers composed these sections. William H. Shea, "Literary Structural Parallels between Genesis 1 and 2," *Origins* 16:2(1989):49-68, showed that the similarities between these sections argue for a common writer.

¹⁴⁴W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁵Cf. Martin Woudstra, "The *Toledot* of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive-Historical Significance," *Calvin Theological Journal* 5:2 (1970):188-89.

measure up to Abraham. Consequently at the end of Genesis the family is not in the land of blessing but in Egypt."¹⁴⁶

2:5-6 These verses describe global conditions before man's creation in terms that stress God's gracious preparation of the world for him. They are a flashback to conditions before 1:26. Moses chose terms that contrast with conditions that existed after the Fall.¹⁴⁷ "Shrubs" were evidently not edible whereas "plants" were. Thus Moses distinguished two types of land: arable and non-arable.¹⁴⁸

The absence of "rain" and the presence of the "mist" have led some writers to postulate a "canopy theory."¹⁴⁹ According to this theory, a canopy of water vapor that watered the earth covered the earth initially. It reduced the destructive rays of the sun so that antediluvian man lived much longer, and it distributed heat more evenly over the surface of this planet. Such a water canopy covers Venus. This canopy supposedly broke up when God sent the Flood (7:11).¹⁵⁰

2:7 "Formed" (Heb. *yasar*) means to shape or mold and implies that God deliberately did this with tender loving care. It describes the work of an artist (cf. Job 10:8-9).

"Dust" (Heb. *haadama*) reflects man's lowly origin. Even though he was in God's image, man was a creature like other creatures God had made. This rules out the view that man descended from the gods, which was popular in the ancient Near East and was foundational in Egyptian cosmology.¹⁵¹ In Creation God raised man out of the dust to reign.¹⁵² However in the Fall man returned to the dust by his own work (3:19).¹⁵³

The "breath of life" (Heb. *nesama*) was God's breath that gave Adam life, spiritual understanding (Job 32:8), and a functioning conscience (Prov. 20:27). Adam's life came from God's breath.¹⁵⁴ His uniqueness consisted in his having been made in God's image. God's breath may be a synonym

¹⁴⁶Ross, "Genesis," p. 24.

¹⁴⁷Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 40.

¹⁴⁸Wenham, p. 58.

¹⁴⁹Whitcomb and Morris; Jody Dillow, *The Waters Above*.

¹⁵⁰For a critique of this view, see Thomas Key, "Does the Canopy Theory Hold Water?" See also Stanley Rice, "Botanical and Ecological Objections to a Preflood Water Canopy," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 37:4 (December 1985):223-29. This is one of those theories that are impossible to prove or disprove conclusively.

¹⁵¹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 41.

¹⁵²See W. Brueggemann, "From Dust to Kingship," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972):1-18.

¹⁵³Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 41.

¹⁵⁴See Mathews, pp. 197-99.

for His word (cf. Ps. 33:6).¹⁵⁵ Man, therefore, is a combination of dust and divinity.¹⁵⁶

2:8-15 The modern equivalent of the Pishon River is unknown for certain. Commentators have suggested that it was the Indus, the Ganges, a river of Arabia, or a river of Mesopotamia. The land of Havilah seems to have been in southwestern Arabia (cf. 25:18). The Gihon may be the pre-flood Nile since Cush in the Old Testament usually describes modern Ethiopia (cf. 10:6-8; Num. 12:1; 2 Sam. 18:19-33; 2 Kings 19:9; 2 Chron. 14:9-15; Isa. 37:9; Jer. 13:23; 38—39).¹⁵⁷ The Tigris and Euphrates are now in Babylonia. Eden (meaning delight, pleasure, or perhaps place of abundant waters) therefore appears to have lain in the general area of the Promised Land (vv. 11-14; cf. Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35; Joel 2:3; Zech. 14:8; Rev. 22:1-2). The Garden of (sometimes "in") Eden seems to have been in the eastern part of Eden. This rather extensive description sets the stage for Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden in 3:24. It probably also encouraged the Israelites to anticipate the Promised Land.

"It can hardly be a coincidence that these rivers, along with the 'River of Egypt,' again play a role in marking boundaries of the land promised to Abraham (Ge 15:18)."¹⁵⁸

The trees in the garden were beautiful and edible, an orchard for man to enjoy (v. 9). The tree of life appears to have been a means whereby God sustained Adam and Eve's lives. Again, God's desire to bless man comes through. The knowledge of good and evil (vv. 9, 17) probably refers to man's ability to decide for himself what is best for him and what is not (i.e., wisdom).¹⁵⁹ "Good" and "evil" may be a merism for the things that protect and destroy life.

Similarities between the descriptions of the garden and the tabernacle are also interesting (cf. Exod. 25-27). Both places reflected the glory of God's presence in their beautiful surroundings (cf. Hag. 2:7-8; Rev. 21:18).¹⁶⁰

The Hebrew word translated "put" in verse 15 (*wayyannihehu*) is not the same one rendered "put" in verse 8 (*wayyasem*). The latter term is the

¹⁵⁵See Ellis R. Brotzman, "Man and the Meaning of *Nephesh* [Soul]," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:580 (October-December 1988):400-9.

¹⁵⁶For defense of the historicity of Adam and Eve, see Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 80, n. 2.

¹⁵⁷See J. Daniel Hays, "The Cushites: A Black Nation in Ancient History," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July-September 1996):270-80; and idem, "The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):396-409. However many interpreters believe this site was in the land of the Cassites east of Mesopotamia, e.g., Ross, "Genesis," p. 31.

¹⁵⁸Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 99.

¹⁵⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 86. For some other views, see Hamilton, pp. 164-66; or Wenham, pp. 63-64.

¹⁶⁰Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 43.

normal one for putting something somewhere. However the former one connotes rest and safety (cf. 19:16; Deut. 3:20; 12:10; 25:19) as well as dedication in God's presence (cf. Exod. 16:33-34; Lev. 16:23; Num. 17:4; Deut. 26:4, 10). God put man in the garden where he could be safe and rest and where he could have fellowship with God (cf. 3:8). His primary responsibility there was to worship and obey God rather than to cultivate and keep the garden, as many English versions state.¹⁶¹ Adam served and thereby worshipped God by tending the garden. Work is essentially a good gift of God, not a punishment for sin.

"The Garden of Eden is a temple-garden, represented later in the tabernacle. Cherubim protect its sanctity (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 26:1; 2 Chron. 3:7) so that sin and death are excluded (Gen. 3:23; Rev. 21:8)."¹⁶²

2:16-17 God gave Adam great freedom of choice. He only forbade one of all the trees. God's command also implies that He alone knows what is good and not good for man. Adam would die because of disobedience, not because of the fruit of the tree.¹⁶³

"That famous tree symbolizes the ability to discern good (i.e., what advances life) and evil (i.e., what hinders life). Such knowledge belongs to God alone because, as Agur inferentially argues in Prov. 30:1-6, one must know comprehensively in order to speak absolutely about what is good and bad."¹⁶⁴

"On the whole it seems probable that we should understand 'death' to mean a spiritual state, but a state aptly symbolized by physical death. When man sinned he passed into a new state, one dominated by, and at the same time symbolized by death. It is likely that spiritual death and physical death are not being thought of as separate, so that the one involves the other."¹⁶⁵

Why did Adam and Eve not die immediately? The phrase "in the day" in Hebrew is an idiom meaning "for certain" (cf. Exod. 10:28; 1 Kings 2:37, 42).

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁶²Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 85.

¹⁶³For a discussion of what God had in mind in the two trees, see Keil and Delitzsch, 1:84-86.

¹⁶⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 46.

¹⁶⁵Leon Morris, *The Wages of Sin*, p. 10. The Hebrew construction emphasizes the certainty of death, however it is defined.

"Before Adam and Eve fell into sin, God made a proposition to them that some have regarded as a covenant, as stated in Genesis 1:26-31 and 2:16-17. God gave Adam authority over the creatures of the world, commanded him to be fruitful, and gave him permission to eat from every green plant. The only restriction was that Adam and Eve not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if they did so they would surely die (2:16-17). Basically, the covenant was conditional, requiring obedience; but it also declared God's purpose to elevate humanity to a place of authority and prominence, ultimately fulfilled by Christ."¹⁶⁶

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

The biblical covenants are normally unconditional in that God obligates Himself to accomplish certain purposes despite human failure, though they may contain conditional elements. The exception is the Mosaic Covenant in which the fulfillment of the promises contained in the covenant depended on Israel's obedience.

The three universal covenants, which affect the whole human race, are the Edenic, Adamic, and Noahic Covenants. All the other covenants affect Israel primarily, though they all affect the rest of humanity secondarily. There are eight major biblical covenants and they help us understand how God is working out His purposes with humankind. These are the Edenic (Gen. 2:16), the Adamic (Gen. 3:15), the Noahic (Gen. 9:16), the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:2), the Mosaic (Exod. 19:5), the Palestinian (Deut. 30:3), the Davidic (2 Sam. 7:16), and the New (Heb. 8:8).

The Edenic Covenant required five things from Adam. He was to propagate the human race, to subdue the earth for human habitation, to exercise dominion over the animal creation, to care for and enjoy the Garden of Eden and its fruits, and to abstain from eating from one tree in the garden.

¹⁶⁶John F. Walvoord, "The New Covenant," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 187-88. The covenant in 2:16-17 has been called the Edenic Covenant.

The creation of woman 2:18-25

2:18 Adam's creation was not complete because he lacked a "helper" who corresponded to him.¹⁶⁷ This deficiency led God to pronounce Adam's condition "not good."¹⁶⁸ This follows the pattern of the triune God's own existence in which He is surrounded by His heavenly court. Man should normally live in community even as God does. God not only evaluated Adam's condition, He also rectified it.

"In Judaism, from the very moment of origins of the Jewish people, marriage was considered to be the ideal state."¹⁶⁹

God's provision of a wife for Adam is a concrete example of God's knowing what is good for man.¹⁷⁰ Companionship replaced isolation. For companionship to be satisfying, however, there must be oneness in the marriage (cf. 1:26-27). Self-centered living destroys oneness and companionship.

The term "helper" does not mean a servant. Jesus Christ used the same word (the Greek equivalent) to describe the Holy Spirit who would help believers following the Lord's ascension (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). It means one who supports us in our task of doing the will of God (cf. Deut. 33:7; Ps. 33:20; 115:9-11; 146:5; Hos. 13:9). It is not a demeaning term since Scripture often uses it to describe God Himself (e.g., Ps. 33:20; 70:5; 115:9).

"The word *help* suggests that the man has governmental priority, but both sexes are mutually dependent on each other. The man is created first, with the woman to help the man, not vice versa (see also 1 Tim. 2:13); however, this does not mean ontological superiority or inferiority. The word *helper*, used for God sixteen of the nineteen times it appears in the Old Testament, signifies the woman's essential contribution, not inadequacy."¹⁷¹

"Suitable to him" or "corresponding to him" means "equal and adequate." What was true of Adam (cf. v. 7) was also true of Eve. They both had the same nature.

¹⁶⁷The ancient Near Eastern texts contain no account of the creation of woman. Moses, however, devoted six verses to her formation compared to only one for Adam (2:7).

¹⁶⁸For helpful comments about anthropomorphisms, as well as divine soliloquies, see Roderick MacKenzie, "The Divine Soliloquies in Genesis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22:1 (1955):277-86.

¹⁶⁹Blu Greenberg, "Marriage in the Jewish Tradition," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22:1 (Winter 1985):3.

¹⁷⁰Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 46.

¹⁷¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 88.

"Since Adam and Eve were a spiritual unity, living in integrity without sin, there was no need for instruction here on headship."¹⁷²

2:19-20 The text does not mean that Adam named every individual animal. He apparently gave names to the different kinds God brought before him. This exercise demonstrated Adam's authority over the animals and the dissimilarity between humans and animals. He became aware of his own need for a companion as he named the animals.

"Adam" comes from the Hebrew word for "earth" (*adamah*). "Adam" means "one that is red," like the earth.¹⁷³ Likewise the names of the animals probably expressed the nature of each animal. Names of humans in Old Testament times usually reflected the nature of the persons who bore them. This indicates that Adam must have had great intelligence and wisdom to be able to identify and label the various types of animals according to their natures.

Man is not like the other animals. Adam could find no suitable partner among them. God graciously provided for his need by creating Eve.

2:21-22 More than once when God initiated a new relationship for someone He first put that person to sleep (cf. 15:12; 28:11). He evidently did so to assure the recipient that his own works had no part in his receiving it.¹⁷⁴ It was totally a gift of God's grace.

". . . the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."¹⁷⁵

"Just as the rib is found at the side of the man and is attached to him, even so the good wife, the rib of her husband, stands at his side to be his helper-counterpart, and her soul is bound up with him."¹⁷⁶

God fashioned Eve to be a suitable companion for Adam. Then He presented her to him as a gift.

"That woman was taken from man no more implies the inferiority of woman to man than the taking of man from

¹⁷²Ross, "Genesis," p. 31.

¹⁷³Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 1:1:2.

¹⁷⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 46.

¹⁷⁵Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁶Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I: From Adam to Noah*, p. 134.

the ground ('adam from 'adamah) implies the inferiority of man to the ground."¹⁷⁷

". . . the whole account of woman's creation has a poetic flavor: it is certainly mistaken to read it as an account of a clinical operation or as an attempt to explain some feature of man's anatomy . . . Rather, it brilliantly depicts the relation of man and wife. . . . Here the ideal of marriage as it was understood in ancient Israel is being portrayed, a relationship characterized by harmony and intimacy between the partners."¹⁷⁸

2:23 The word "woman" (Heb. *ishah*) sounds similar to the Hebrew word translated "man" (*ish*). This similarity reflects the close union between the two.¹⁷⁹ Moses named Adam by his relation to the ground, but Adam named himself in relation to his wife.¹⁸⁰

"Gen. 2 is unique among the creation myths of the whole of the Ancient Near East in its appreciation of the meaning of woman, i.e., that human existence is a partnership of man and woman."¹⁸¹

"Though they are equal in nature, that man names woman (cf. 3:20) indicates that she is expected to be subordinate to him, an important presupposition of the ensuing narrative (3:17)."¹⁸²

When Adam discovered that God had provided him with a partner like himself, not like one of the other animals, he rejoiced greatly. He received his mate as God's good gift to him because he trusted in God's wisdom, goodness, and integrity. Likewise it is essential for every husband and wife to thankfully receive the mate God has given us as His best provision for us. To do so we must know and trust God's goodness. Our mate's differences are good things God brings to us that He will use as tools to shape us into the people He wants us to be. Failure to accept one's mate as a good gift from a loving God leads to many problems in marriage and frustrates God's purpose and plan for marriage. It expresses rejection of

¹⁷⁷Merrill, p. 19.

¹⁷⁸Wenham, p. 69.

¹⁷⁹See George W. Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50:1 (January 1988):24-35. He and others believe it is not, but still others do, e.g., von Rad, p. 83, who wrote, "Name-giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of sovereignty, of command."

¹⁸⁰Sarna, p. 23.

¹⁸¹Westermann, p. 232.

¹⁸²Wenham, p. 70.

God and His provision for one's life. It also demonstrates unbelief, disobedience, and displeasure with God's character. Your mate needs your unconditional acceptance. Adam was now beside himself! (Pardon the pun.)

2:24 This verse clarifies God's purpose in marriage. It involves leaving parents and cleaving to one's spouse.¹⁸³

". . . Israelite marriage was usually patrilocal, that is, the man continued to live in or near his parents' home. It was the wife who left home to join her husband."¹⁸⁴

Leaving and cleaving probably means both psychological and physical separation and union under normal conditions. A newly married couple is wise to establish relative independence from both sets of parents emotionally, physically, financially, and in other ways. The couple also needs to establish commitment to one another. Cleaving resembles weaving two threads into one new piece of cloth. The word suggests the ideas of passion and permanence. In marriage a man's priorities change. Before they were primarily to his parents, but now they are primarily to his wife. Moses was probably correcting cultures that gave parental bonds priority over marital bonds.¹⁸⁵ Marriage also involves physical consummation that unites two individuals as "one flesh." This is a strong argument for monogamy. "One flesh" is not the same as marriage (1 Cor. 6:16). For a marriage to exist there must also be a commitment to "leave" parents and "cleave" to one's spouse from then on (cf. Matt. 19:5; et al.). The bond of marriage (spouse) also takes priority over the bond of procreation (children).

2:25 The naked condition of Adam and Eve does not just describe their unclothed physical appearance. It also refers to the physical and psychological oneness and transparency that existed in their relationship. Physically they were naked; they shared their bodies with each other openly. Psychologically they were not ashamed; they hid nothing from each other. They were at ease with one another without any fear of exploitation for evil. Transparency should increase with trust, commitment, and friendship. It involves communicating what we know, think, feel, and are with the person or persons we choose. We should not be transparent with everyone, however, only with people who commit themselves to us. A transparent person is an open and vulnerable person.

This is a hinge (janus) verse. It looks backward into chapter 2 and forward into chapter 3. The similarity of the Hebrew words for naked (*'arom*) and

¹⁸³See Mathews, pp. 222-24.

¹⁸⁴Wenham, p. 70.

¹⁸⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 90.

"crafty" (3:1, *'arum*) points to a word play. This word for nakedness means unclothed whereas the one in 3:7 (*'erom*) and elsewhere describes those under God's judgment (cf. Deut. 28:48; Ezek. 16:39; 23:29).¹⁸⁶

Verses 18-25 teach us much about marriage.

1. God instituted it.
2. God intended it to be monogamous (not monotonous). One woman completed Adam (cf. Matt. 19:8).
3. God intended it to be heterosexual.
4. It involves both a physical and a spiritual union (2:24; cf. Matt. 19:4-5).
5. The husband was to be the head of the wife. God created Adam before Eve, and He created Eve for Adam (cf. 1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:13).
6. A woman can be a complete person without bearing children. A wife's basic function in marriage is to complement her husband, not to bear children.
7. Normally, a couple, following the lead of their representatives, Adam and Eve, should "be fruitful and multiply" (1:28). God did not specify how early in the marriage and to what extent. He left this up to the couple. Couples may choose when and how many children they plan to have, though God may sovereignly overrule their plans.

The Family Ministry organization has summarized these purposes as five. Marriage should mirror God's image, multiply a godly heritage, manage God's realm, mutually complete one another, and model Christ's relationship to the church.¹⁸⁷

The Bible writers made use of the creation account in many different ways, and we too can use it in these ways for our own personal profit. These purposes include glorifying the God of creation, stimulating praise and worship, and fortifying faith in God's promises. They also include learning about God's attributes, expressing wonder at man's position in God's universe, dispelling fear, and exalting the Lord Jesus.¹⁸⁸

However a main point of this unit (2:4-25) seems clearly to be that God made human beings male and female with a spiritual capacity and mutually dependent. He did so that they might serve and obey Him and so enjoy His creation. As Adam and Eve, God later placed Israel in a place of blessing. The nation could enjoy His blessing by being obedient and trusting with the assistance He had provided for them in marriage. Even today serving and obeying God is man's greatest privilege, and we find help to do this in the marriage relationship.

"Two primary themes dominate the Creation account [1:1—2:25]: the land and the blessing."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 49.

¹⁸⁷*Family Life Conference*, p. 45.

¹⁸⁸Ted S. Rendall, "Using the Creation Account for Maximum Spiritual Profit," *Prairie Overcomer* 60:8 (September 1987):3-5, 22.

¹⁸⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, pp. 81-82. Cf. 12:1-3, 7.

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

The temptation of Eve 3:1-5

As in chapters 1 and 2, the word of the Lord is very important in chapter 3. Here Adam and Eve doubted God's integrity. This pericope also has something to teach about the acquisition of wisdom. Chapter 2 anticipated God's gift of the Promised Land to the original readers, and chapter 3 anticipates their exile from it.¹⁹⁰

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

1. **It was a literal snake.**
 - a. Moses called it a beast of the field (v. 1).
 - b. Though snakes do not speak, Satan could have spoken through a snake. He did this through demoniacs in Jesus' day. Also, a spirit being spoke through Balaam's donkey.
 - c. God judged a snake in this case (v. 14).¹⁹¹
2. **It was Satan himself described here as a snake.**
 - a. God called Satan a serpent elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Rev. 20:2).
 - b. Satan can and does speak as recorded elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Job 1).
 - c. What he said here is in character for Satan who is the "father of lies" (John 8:44).

Probably the tempter was Satan who possessed and controlled a literal snake. Temptation came to Eve disguised, unexpectedly, and from a subordinate, as is still often true.

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

Satan's first step was to plant a seed of doubt in Eve's mind concerning God's ways (vv. 1-3). The key phrase is "from any" (v. 1). Satan focused Eve's attention on God's one prohibition. He suggested that God did not really want what was best for Adam and Eve but rather was withholding something from them that was essentially good. He hinted that God's line of protection was actually a line that He drew because He was selfish. Satan often tempts women in particular to believe that God's role for them is primarily for His benefit rather than for their welfare.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰Idem, "Genesis," pp. 48-49.

¹⁹¹See Jacqueline Tabick, "The Snake in the Grass: The Problems of Interpreting a Symbol in the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Writings," *Religion* 16 (April 1986):155-67. She traced the symbolic use of the snake as a servant of God, a symbol of rebellion against God, and a creature independent of God.

¹⁹²*Family Life* . . . , p. 99.

The Hebrew word translated "crafty" (*'arum*) does not mean wicked as much as wise. Eve's sin was not so much an act of great wickedness as it was an act of great folly. She already had all the good she needed, but she wanted more. She wanted to glorify self, not God.

3:2-3 Eve was vulnerable to this suggestion because she distorted the word of God. She added to it "or touch it" (v. 3).

"In her reply to [the serpent's] question, she perverted and misquoted *three times* the divine law to which she and Adam were subject: (1) She disparaged her privileges by misquoting the terms of the Divine *permission* as to the other trees. (2) She overstated the restrictions by misquoting the Divine *prohibition*. (3) She underrated her obligations by misquoting the Divine *penalty*."¹⁹³

God reveals His character through His word. When we do not retain His word precisely, a distorted concept of God is the result. This led Eve to *doubt* God's *goodness*.

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

"It is because 'Yahweh Elohim' expresses so strongly the basic OT convictions about God's being both creator and Israel's covenant partner that the serpent and the woman avoid the term in their discussion. The god they are talking about is malevolent, secretive, and concerned to restrict man: his character is so different from that of Yahweh Elohim that the narrative pointedly avoids the name in the dialogue of 3:1-5."¹⁹⁴

One natural tendency that we have when we do not understand or recall God's word precisely is to make it more restrictive than He does. This is what Eve did. This is a form of legalism.

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

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

¹⁹³W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, p. 48.

¹⁹⁴Wenham, p. 57.

What the serpent said about Eve being as God was a half-truth. Ironically she was already as God having been made in His image (1:26). She did become like God, or divine beings (Heb. *'elohim*), in that she obtained a greater knowledge of good and evil by eating of the tree. However, she became less like God because she was no longer innocent of sin. Her relationship with God suffered. Though she remained like God she could no longer be with Him. The consequent separation from God is the essence of death (2:17).

The first doctrine Satan denied in Scripture was that sin results in death (separation from God), or we could say the doctrine that God will not punish sin. This is still the truth he tries hardest to get people to disbelieve.

The Fall 3:6-8

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

"It is hardly too much to say that this chapter is the pivot of the Bible With the exception of the fact of Creation, we have here the record of the most important and far-reaching event in the world's history—the entrance of sin."¹⁹⁵

". . . Genesis does not explain the origins of evil; rather, the biblical account, if anything, says where evil does *not* have its source. Evil was not inherent in man nor can it be said that sin was the consequence of divine entrapment. The tempter stands outside the human pair and stands opposed to God's word."¹⁹⁶

3:6 Having succumbed to temptation Eve *disobeyed* God's will. Whereas the serpent initiated the first two steps, he let Eve's natural desires (her flesh) carry her into his trap.

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

1. She saw that the tree was "good for food" (the lust of the flesh: the desire to *do* something contrary to God's will, i.e., eat the tasty fruit).
2. It was a "delight to the eyes" (the lust of the eyes: the desire to *have* something apart from God's will, i.e., possess the beautiful fruit).

¹⁹⁵Thomas, p. 46.

¹⁹⁶Mathews, p. 226.

3. It was "desirable to make one wise" (the pride of life: the desire to *be* something apart from God's will, i.e., as wise as God, or gods). It was the quest for wisdom that led Eve to disobey God.¹⁹⁷

Eve saw, coveted, and took the fruit (cf. Josh. 7:21; 2 Sam. 11:2-4). We think, then lust, then act.

"We have already noted . . . how the scenes themselves are arranged in a concentric palistrophic pattern (ABCDCBA). Within this central scene, the same device is used; the midpoint 'and he ate' employs the key verb of this tale—'eat.' On either side we have the woman's hopes of eating, 'good to eat,' 'delight to the eyes,' 'giving insight,' balanced by its effects, 'eyes opened,' 'knowing they were nude,' 'hiding in the trees.' These contrasts are deliberately drawn."¹⁹⁸

"The proposition that an adult can gaze at anything is ludicrous and naive, for gazing is too often followed by desiring and sinning."¹⁹⁹

In view of Jesus' statement that a lustful look is as sinful as an overt act of sin (Matt. 5:27-28), did Eve commit the first sin when she desired the forbidden fruit? Sinful desires are sinful, but temptations are not sins until we respond by giving in to them. Eve did this when she ate the fruit. Until she did that, she was only experiencing temptation.

Dr. Harry Ironside used to quote a man from Wales. He answered in response to a question about how to avoid temptation, "I can't keep the birds from flying over my head, but I can keep them from nesting in my hair."

"Here is the essence of covetousness. It is the attitude that says I need something I do not now have in order to be happy."²⁰⁰

"What Adam and Eve sought from the tree of knowledge was not philosophical or scientific knowledge desired by the Greeks, but practical knowledge that would give them blessing and fulfillment."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 51.

¹⁹⁸Wenham, p. 75.

¹⁹⁹Davis, p. 90.

²⁰⁰Hamilton, p. 190.

²⁰¹K. Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, p. 27.

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

"The root of sin should be understood. The foundation of all sin lies in man's desire of self-assertion and his determination to be independent of God. Adam and Eve chafed under the restriction laid upon them by the command of God, and it was in opposition to this that they asserted themselves, and thereby fell. Man does not like to be dependent upon another, and subject to commands upon another, and subject to commands from without. He desires to go his own way, to be his own master; and as a consequence he sins, and becomes 'lord of himself, that heritage of woe.'"²⁰²

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

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

3:7-8 The separation that sin produces in man's relationship with God stands out clearly in these verses. Their new knowledge that the serpent promised would make them as God actually taught them that they were no longer even like each other. They were ashamed of their nakedness and sewed fig leaves together to hide their differences from each other (v. 7).²⁰³ Perhaps they chose fig leaves because fig leaves are large and strong.

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

"A more complete transformation could not be imagined. The trust of innocence is replaced by the fear of guilt. The trees that God created for man to look at (2:9) are now his hiding place to prevent God seeing him."²⁰⁴

²⁰²Thomas, p. 49. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 103.

²⁰³Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 52.

²⁰⁴Wenham, p. 76.

Verse 7 marks the beginning of the second dispensation, the dispensation of conscience (or moral responsibility). Adam and Eve had failed in their responsibility under the dispensation of innocence; they were now sinners. They had rebelled against a specific command of God (2:16-17), and this rebellion marked a transition from theoretical to experiential knowledge of good and evil. Their new responsibility now became to do all known good, to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God through blood sacrifice, which anticipated the sacrifice of Christ. As a period of testing for humanity, the dispensation of conscience ended with the Flood. However people continued to be morally responsible to God as He added further revelation of Himself and His will in succeeding ages (cf. Acts 14:14-16; Rom. 2:15; 2 Cor. 4:2).

Eve did not die at once physically, but she did die at once spiritually. She experienced alienation in her relationship with God. Death means separation in the Bible, never annihilation. Sin always results in alienation: theologically (between God and man), sociologically (between man and man), psychologically (between man and himself), and ecologically (between man and nature).²⁰⁵

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

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

"There is nothing in Scripture to suggest that the woman was inferior to the man in any way or more susceptible to temptation than he was."²⁰⁶

"The tempter addresses himself to the woman, probably not because she is more open to temptation and prone to sin, for that is hardly the conception of the Old Testament elsewhere. The reason may have lain in this, that the woman had not personally received the prohibition from God, as Adam had."²⁰⁷

Eve may have been deceived because God had given the prohibition to Adam (2:16); she may have received God's word through Adam. Perhaps Satan appealed to Eve because she was not only under God's authority but also under her husband's authority and, therefore, more inclined to think God was withholding something from her.

"It is interesting to observe that when this sin is referred to throughout Scripture, it is not referred to as the sin of Eve—but rather as the sin of

²⁰⁵Oz Guinness, *The Dust of Death*, p. 35-36, after Augustine and Calvin. We might also add, sexually (between men and women) and maritally (between husband and wife).

²⁰⁶Susan Foh, *Women and the Word of God*, p. 63.

²⁰⁷Gerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 45.

Adam! The phrase in verse 6, 'with her,' seems to suggest that Adam was at Eve's side when she was tempted by Satan. As God's theocratic administrator, and as the appointed head of the family, it was Adam's responsibility to safeguard Eve and to assure that she remained in submission to the command of God. But Adam failed in his God-given responsibility and permitted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit."²⁰⁸

Adam, however, was not deceived (1 Tim. 2:14). He sinned with his eyes wide open (v. 6b). Eve's was a sin of initiative whereas Adam's was one of acquiescence.²⁰⁹ Too much aggressiveness by a woman and too much passivity by a man still are sinful tendencies of the respective sexes. Death "passed unto all men" (Rom. 5:12) when Adam sinned because Adam, not Eve, was the head of the human race under God's administration.²¹⁰

Some commentators have interpreted eating the forbidden fruit as a euphemism for having sexual intercourse.²¹¹ They say that the original sin was a sexual sin. However the text makes such an interpretation impossible.

1. Eve sinned first (v. 6).
2. Eve sinned alone (v. 6).
3. God had previously approved sex (1:28).

"Adam and Eve's nakedness (2:25) does not idealize nudity but shows why human beings must wear clothes. With the Fall came a tragic loss of innocence (together with resulting shame). When people's minds are enlightened by the gospel, they understand their moral frailty and practice customs of dress that shield them against sexual temptation."²¹²

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

²⁰⁸Pentecost, p. 37.

²⁰⁹Hamilton, p. 191.

²¹⁰See Jimmy A. Milliken, "The Origin of Death," *Mid-American Theological Journal* 7:2 (Winter 1983):17-22.

²¹¹E.g., E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 26.

²¹²Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 103.

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

This section begins to relate the effects of the Fall. We now see the God who was creator and benefactor in chapters 1 and 2 as judge (cf. 1:3-4). He first interrogated the offenders to obtain a confession, then announced new conditions for life, and finally provided for the sinners graciously. The sinners' responsibility was to confess their sins and to accept and trust in God's provision for them (cf. 1 John 1:9).

Note that God took the initiative in seeking out the sinners to re-establish a relationship with them. Evidence of God's love is His unwillingness to abandon those He loved even when they failed to do His will. His approach was tender as well as gracious (vv. 9, 11, 13).

"In . . . spite of the apparent similarity in expression to pagan religions the anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament reveal all the more remarkably a sharply contrasting concept of deity."²¹³

The text records several effects of the Fall on Adam and Eve.

1. They felt guilt and shame (v. 7)
2. They tried to change these conditions by their own efforts (v. 7).
3. They fled from God's presence out of fear of Him (vv. 8, 10).
4. They tried to blame their sin on another rather than confessing personal responsibility (vv. 12, 13).

The fact that Adam viewed God's good gift to him, Eve, as the source of his trouble shows how far he fell (v. 12). He virtually accused God of causing him to fall by giving him what he now regarded as a bad gift.

The judgment of the guilty 3:14-21

As the result of man's disobedience to God, the creation suffered a curse and began to deteriorate.²¹⁴ Having been thrice blessed by God (1:22, 28; 2:3) the creation now experienced a triple curse (3:14, 17; 4:11).

"In the Bible, to curse means to invoke God's judgment on someone, usually for some particular offense."²¹⁵

Nevertheless God also began recreation with the promise of the seed, the land, the dominion, and the rest for trust in His powerful word.

²¹³Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Anthropomorphism in Ancient Religions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:497 (January-March 1968):29.

²¹⁴Evolution teaches that man is improving his condition through self-effort. The Bible teaches that man is destroying his condition through sin.

²¹⁵Wenham, p. 78.

Verses 14-19 reveal the terms of the second major biblical covenant, the Adamic Covenant. Here God specified the conditions under which fallen man was to live (until God lifts His curse on creation in the messianic kingdom; Rom. 8:21). The elements of this covenant can be summarized as follows. God cursed the serpent (v. 14) but promised a redeemer (v. 15). He changed the status of the woman in three respects: she would experience multiplied conception, sorrow and pain in motherhood, and headship by the man (v. 16). God also changed Adam and Eve's light workload in Eden to burdensome labor and inevitable sorrow because of His curse on the earth (vv. 17-19). Finally, He promised certain physical death for Adam and all his descendents (v. 19).

Effects on the serpent 3:14-15

God's judgment on each trespasser (the snake, the woman, and the man) involved both a life function and a relationship.²¹⁶ In each case the punishment corresponded to the nature of the crime.

"Curses are uttered against the serpent and the ground, but not against the man and woman, implying that the blessing has not been utterly lost. It is not until human murder, a transgression against the *imago Dei*, that a person (Cain) receives the divine curse . . ." ²¹⁷

1. The snake had been crafty (Heb. '*arum*'), but now it was cursed (Heb. '*arur*'). It had to move on its belly (v. 14). Some commentators take this literally and conclude that the snake had legs before God cursed it.²¹⁸ Others take it figuratively as a reference to the resultant despised condition of the snake.²¹⁹
2. It would eat dust (v. 14). Since snakes do not literally feed on dust, many interpreters take this statement figuratively. Eating dust is an expression used in other ancient Near Eastern writings to describe the lowest of all forms of life. In the Bible it also describes humiliation and total defeat (cf. Ps. 44:25; 72:9; Isa. 25:12; 49:23; 65:25; Mic. 7:17).

God revealed later through Isaiah that serpents will eat dust during the Millennium (Isa. 65:25). Presently snakes eat plants and animals. Perhaps God will yet fulfill this part of what He predicted here in Genesis concerning snakes in the millennial kingdom. This is a literal interpretation. If this is correct, then perhaps we should also take the former part of the curse literally, namely, that snakes did not travel on their bellies before the Fall. Alternatively Isaiah may have meant that serpents will continue to suffer the curse pronounced on them here even after God lifts the curse on creation generally in the Millennium.

²¹⁶J. T. Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b—3:24: A Synchronic Approach," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977):168.

²¹⁷Mathews, p. 243.

²¹⁸E.g., Josephus, 1:1:50.

²¹⁹E.g., Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 1:162; Kidner, p. 70; Mathews, p. 244.

3. There would be antagonism between the serpent and human beings (v. 15a). This obviously exists between snakes and people, but God's intention in this verse seems to include the person behind the snake (Satan) as well as, and even more than, the snake itself.

". . . the seed of the serpent refers to natural humanity whom he has led into rebellion against God. Humanity is now divided into two communities: the elect, who love God, and the reprobate, who love self (John 8:31-32, 44; 1 John 3:8). Each of the characters of Genesis will be either of the seed of the woman that reproduces her spiritual propensity, or of the seed of the Serpent that reproduces his unbelief."²²⁰

4. Man would eventually destroy the serpent, though the serpent would wound man (v. 15b). This is a prophecy of the victory of the ultimate "Seed" of the woman (Messiah) over Satan (cf. Rev. 19:1-5; Gal. 3:16, 19; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8).²²¹ Most interpreters have recognized this verse as the first biblical promise of the provision of salvation (the *protoevangelium* or "first gospel").²²² The rest of the book, in fact the whole Old Testament, proceeds to point ahead to that seed.

"The snake, for the author, is representative of someone or something else. The snake is represented by his 'seed.' When that 'seed' is crushed, the head of the snake is crushed. Consequently more is at stake in this brief passage than the reader is at first aware of. A program is set forth. A plot is established that will take the author far beyond this or that snake and his 'seed.' It is what the snake and His 'seed' represent that lies at the center of the author's focus. With that 'one' lies the 'enmity' that must be crushed."²²³

"The text in context provides an outline that is correct and clear in pattern but not complete in all details. Numerous questions are left unanswered. When Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, the details of the climax were filled in and specified, but the text does not demand to be reinterpreted. Nor does it demand interpretation in a way not suggested in context."²²⁴

²²⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 93-94. Cf. p. 46.

²²¹See John Sailhamer, "The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001):5-23.

²²²See John C. Jeske, "The Gospel Adam and Eve Heard: Genesis 3:15" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 81:3 (Summer 1984):182-84; and Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:518 (April-June 1973):135-50.

²²³Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 55. See also Mathews, pp. 246-48.

²²⁴Elliott E. Johnson, "Premillennialism Introduced: Hermeneutics," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 22. See also Darrell L. Bock, "Interpreting the Bible—How Texts Speak to Us," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 81; Wenham, pp. 80-81.

God cursed all animals and the whole creation because of the Fall (Rom. 8:20), but He made the snake the most despicable of all the animals for its part in the Fall.

"Words possess power. God's words of blessing and of curse are most powerful. They determine our lives."²²⁵

Effects on women 3:16

1. Eve would experience increased pain in bearing children. There evidently would have been some pain in the process of bearing children before the Fall. Eve and her daughters would experience increased pain. The text does not say that God promised more conception as well as more pain.²²⁶ "Pain" and "childbirth" is probably another hendiadys in the Hebrew text meaning pregnancy pain.
2. Their desire would be for their husbands. There have been several different interpretations of what the woman's "desire" would be.

- a. The phrase "your desire will be for your husband" means that a woman's desire would be subject to her husband's desire.

"Her desire, whatever it may be, will not be her own. She cannot do what she wishes, for her husband rules over her like a despot and whatever she wishes is subject to his will."²²⁷

- b. The woman will have a great longing, yearning, and psychological dependence on her husband.

"This yearning is morbid. It is not merely sexual yearning. It includes the attraction that woman experiences for man which she cannot root from her nature. Independent feminists may seek to banish it, but it persists in cropping out."²²⁸

- c. The woman will desire to dominate the relationship with her husband. This view rests on the parallel Hebrew construction in 4:7.

"The 'curse' here describes the beginning of the battle of the sexes. After the Fall, the husband no longer rules easily; he must fight for his headship. The woman's desire is to control her husband (to usurp his divinely appointed headship), and he must master her, if he can. Sin had corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband. And so the rule of love

²²⁵Pamela J. Scalise, "The Significance of Curses and Blessings," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):59.

²²⁶Cf. Schaeffer, p. 93.

²²⁷E. J. Young, *Genesis 3*, p. 127. Cf. John Calvin, *Genesis*, p. 172.

²²⁸Leupold, 1:172. Cf. Gini Andrews, *Your Half of the Apple*, p. 51.

founded in paradise is replaced by struggle, tyranny, domination, and manipulation."²²⁹

- d. The woman would continue to desire to have sexual relations with her husband even though after the Fall she experienced increased pain in childbearing.

"... the woman's desire for the man and his rule over her are not the punishment but the conditions in which the woman will suffer punishment. . . . It may be concluded that, in spite of the Fall, the woman will have a longing for intimacy with man involving more than sexual intimacy. . . ."²³⁰

This view takes this statement of God as a blessing rather than a curse.

Effects on humanity generally 3:17-19

1. Adam would have to toil hard to obtain a living from the ground (vv. 17-18). Adam already had received the privilege of enjoying the garden (2:15), but this did not require strenuous toil.

"As for the man, his punishment consists in the hardship and skimpiness of his livelihood, which he now must seek for himself. The woman's punishment struck at the deepest root of her being as wife and mother, the man's strikes at the innermost nerve of his life: his work, his activity, and provision for sustenance."²³¹

"These punishments represent retaliatory justice. Adam and Eve sinned by eating; they would suffer in order to eat. She manipulated her husband; she would be mastered by her husband. The serpent destroyed the human race; he will be destroyed."²³²

"In drawing a contrast between the condition of the land before and after the Fall, the author shows that the present condition of the land was not the way it was intended to be. Rather, the state of the land was the result of human rebellion. In so doing, the author has paved the way for a central motif in the structure of biblical eschatology, the hope of a 'new heaven and a new earth' (cf. Isa 65:17: [*sic*] Ro 8:22-24; Rev 21:1)."²³³

²²⁹Foh, p. 69. See also her article, "What is the Woman's Desire?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 37:3 (Spring 1975):376-383; Mathews, p. 251; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 94. This view seems best to me.

²³⁰Irving Busenitz, "Woman's Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered," *Grace Theological Journal* 7:2 (Fall 1986):203, 206-8. Cf. Song of Sol. 7:10.

²³¹von Rad, pp. 93-94.

²³²Ross, "Genesis," p. 33.

²³³Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 109.

2. He would return to dust when he died (v. 19). Rather than living forever experiencing physical immortality, people would now die physically and experience physical mortality.

"Genesis 3:19 does not attribute the cause of death to the original composition of the human body, so that man would ultimately have died anyway, but states merely one of the consequences of death: Since the human body was formed from the dust of the earth, it shall, upon death, be resolved to earth again."²³⁴

Verse 18 shows the reversal of the land's condition before and after the Fall. Verse 19 shows the same for man's condition.

"Adam and Eve failed . . . to observe the restrictions of the Edenic covenant [1:26-31; 2:16-17]. Innocence was lost and conscience was born. . . .

"Having failed under the Edenic covenant, human beings were then faced with the provisions of the Adamic covenant [3:14-19]. That covenant was unconditional in the sense that Adam and Eve's descendants would be unable by human effort to escape the consequences of sin. . . .

"A ray of light is provided, however, in the Adamic covenant because God promised that a redeemer would come [3:15]. . . . This is the introduction of the great theme of grace and redemption found in the Scriptures. . . .

"Unless tempered by the grace of God and changed by subsequent promises, people continue to the present time to labor under the provisions of the Adamic covenant."²³⁵

Additional effects on Adam and Eve 3:20-21

Adam and Eve accepted their judgment from God and did not rebel against it. We see this in Adam's naming Eve the mother of all living, a personal name that defines her destiny (v. 20). He believed life would continue in spite of God's curse. This was an act of faith and an expression of hope. He believed God's promise that she would bear children (v. 16). His wife's first name, "woman" (2:23), looked back on her origin, whereas her second name, "Eve," anticipated her destiny.

1. Note that before God sent them out into a new environment He provided them with clothing that was adequate for their needs (cf. Rom. 3:21-26). Their own provision (v. 7) was not adequate. He did for them what they could not do for themselves.

²³⁴Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, p. 143.

²³⁵Walvoord, p. 188.

". . . he [Adam] had to learn that sin could be covered not by a bunch of leaves snatched from a bush as he passed by and that would grow again next year, but only by pain and blood."²³⁶

2. Furthermore, God prevented Adam and Eve from living perpetually in their fallen state (vv. 22-24).

Expulsion from the garden 3:22-24

Verse 22 shows that man's happiness (good) does not consist in his being *like* God as much as it depends on his being *with* God (cf. Ps. 16:11).²³⁷ "Like one of us" probably means like heavenly beings (God and the angels; cf. 1:26).²³⁸

Cherubim in the Old Testament surround and symbolize God's presence. They are similar to God's bodyguards. Ancient oriental iconography pictured them as human-headed winged lions guarding holy places.²³⁹ Moses pictured them here defending the tree of life with a flaming sword. They guarded the Ark of the Covenant later as they earlier guarded the tree of life in the garden (v. 24). The laws contained in the Ark were a source of life for the Israelites. The golden lampstand in the tabernacle represented a tree of life and the presence of God.²⁴⁰

As people moved east from the garden they settled in Shinar and built Babel (Babylon, 11:2). When Lot departed from Abraham he moved east to Sodom (13:11). When Abraham came back from the East he returned to the Promised Land and the city of Salem (peace, 14:17-20). Thus God's presence continued to reside in the garden (Promised Land?) in a localized sense and movement to the east from there typically involved departing from Him.

"No matter how hard people try to do away with male dominion, agonizing labor, painful childbearing, and death, these evils will continue because sin is present. They are the fruits of sin."²⁴¹

Rebellion against God results in suffering and death, but confession secures His gracious provisions. This section explains why human beings toil and agonize all their lives and finally die. Sin is responsible, and only the removal of sin will end this condition. God is a savior as well as a judge in this pericope. Moses introduced the way of covering sin, namely, through the death of an innocent substitute. Consequently there is hope in the midst of tragedy.²⁴²

²³⁶Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 25.

²³⁷Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 59.

²³⁸Wenham, p. 85; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 95.

²³⁹James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, pp. 159-60, plates 456, 458.

²⁴⁰Wenham, p. 86.

²⁴¹Ross, "Genesis," p. 33.

²⁴²See Steve Davis, "Stories of the Fall in the Ancient Near East," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):37-40. On the larger issue of sin's origin, see William K. Harrison, "The Origin of Sin," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:517 (January-March 1973):58-61.

"The chapter simply does not support the concept that one finds fulfillment and bliss in liberating oneself from subordination to God's word, his permissions and his denials. Man is not suddenly metamorphosed from a puppet to a free and independent thinker. In fact, he never was an automaton. If man had lacked the ability to choose, the prohibition from God not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil would have been superfluous. One is not told to abstain from something unless he has the capacity not to abstain."²⁴³

Thus Genesis 3 introduces us to the fact of human freedom as well as reminding us of divine sovereignty.²⁴⁴

2. The murder of Abel 4:1-16

Chapter 4 shows the spread of sin from Adam's family to the larger society that his descendants produced. Not only did sin affect everyone, but people became progressively more wicked as time passed. Human self-assertion results in violence. Verses 1-16 show that the Fall affected Adam and Eve's children as well as themselves. Verses 17-26 trace what became of Cain and Seth and their descendants. Note that the chapter begins and ends with the subject of worship.

God had warned Adam and Eve about sin. Even so, Cain murdered his brother, the beginning of sibling rivalry, because God accepted Abel's offering but not his own.²⁴⁵ He denied responsibility for his sin and objected to the severity of God's punishment. God graciously provided protection for Cain in response to his complaint. Chapter 3 gives the cause and chapter 4 the effect.

There are structural and conceptual parallels between this pericope (section of verses) and the previous one (2:4—3:24).²⁴⁶

- A** Scene 1 (narrative): Cain and Abel are active, Yahweh passive (vv. 2b-5).
- B** Scene 2 (dialogue): Yahweh questions Cain (vv. 6-7).
- C** Scene 3 (dialogue and narrative): Cain and Abel are alone (v. 8).
- B'** Scene 4 (dialogue): Yahweh confronts Cain (vv. 9-14).
- A'** Scene 5 (narrative): Yahweh is active, Cain passive (vv. 15-16).

Both stories conclude with the sinners leaving God's presence and going to live east of Eden (3:24; 4:16).

²⁴³Hamilton, p. 211.

²⁴⁴See Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (July-September 2004):259-73.

²⁴⁵Sibling rivalry plagued each of the godly families in Genesis.

²⁴⁶Wenham, p. 99.

". . . though the writer of Genesis wants to highlight the parallels between the two stories, he does not regard the murder of Abel simply as a rerun of the fall. There is development: sin is more firmly entrenched and humanity is further alienated from God."²⁴⁷

4:1-8 Was Eve thanking God for helping her bear a son (Cain),²⁴⁸ or was she boasting that she had created a man (Cain) as God had created a man (Adam, v. 1)?²⁴⁹ The former alternative seems preferable (cf. v. 25). "Cain" means "acquisition" a portent of his own primary proclivity. Abel, from the Hebrew *hebel*, means "breath, vapor, exhalation, or what ascends."²⁵⁰ As things turned out, his life was short like a vapor.

Why did God "have regard" for Abel's offering and not Cain's (v. 4)? It was because Abel had faith (Heb. 11:4). What did Abel believe that Cain did not? The Bible does not say specifically. The answer may lie in one or more of the following explanations.²⁵¹

1. Some commentators believed Abel's attitude reveals his faith. Cain's improper attitude toward God is evident in verse 5.²⁵²
2. Others say Abel's faith is evident in his bringing the best of the flock (v. 4) whereas Moses did not so describe Cain's offering (v. 3).

"He [the writer] characterizes Abel's offerings from the flocks as 'from the firstborn' and 'from their fat.' By offering the firstborn Abel signified that he recognized God as the Author and Owner of Life. In common with the rest of the ancient Near East, the Hebrews believed that the deity, or lord of the manor, was entitled to the *first share* of all produce. The *firstfruits* of plants and the *firstborn* of animals and man were his. . . .

"Abel's offering conformed with this theology; Cain's did not. In such a laconic story the interpreter may not ignore that whereas Abel's gift is qualified by 'firstborn,' the parallel 'firstfruits' does not modify Cain's. . . .

²⁴⁷Ibid., p. 100.

²⁴⁸Mathews, p. 265; Wenham, pp. 101-2.

²⁴⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, pp. 111-12; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 96.

²⁵⁰"Abel" also means "meadow" elsewhere.

²⁵¹See Jack P. Lewis, "The Offering of Abel (Gen 4:4): A History of Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:4 (December 1994):481-96.

²⁵²Davis, p. 99; Pentecost, p. 41; et al.

"Abel also offered the 'fat' which in the so-called 'P' [Priestly] material belonged to the Lord and was burned symbolically by the priests. This tastiest and best burning part of the offering represented the best. Abel's sacrifice, the interlocutor aims to say, passed the test with flying colors. Cain's sacrifice, however, lacks a parallel to 'fat.'"²⁵³

Possibly Cain's bad attitude resulted in his not offering the best to God. In other words, both options 1 and 2 could be correct.

"Abel went out of his way to please God (which meant he had faith in God, Heb. 1:6), whereas Cain was simply discharging a duty."²⁵⁴

"We think the absence of 'firstfruits' for Cain in juxtaposition with Seth's 'firstborn' would not have been lost on the Mosaic audience.

"Both giver and gift were under the scrutiny of God. Cain's offering did not measure up because he retained the best of his produce for himself."²⁵⁵

3. Many believe that Abel realized the need for the death of a living substitute to atone for his sins, but Cain did not. If he understood this, he must have learned it by divine revelation that Scripture did not record explicitly.²⁵⁶

"Faith always presupposes a Divine revelation to which it is the response . . ."²⁵⁷

"Whatever the cause of God's rejection of Cain's offering, the narrative itself focuses our attention on Cain's response. It is there that the narrative seeks to make its point."²⁵⁸

God questioned Cain, as He had Adam and Eve (cf. 3:9, 11), to elicit Cain's admission of sin with a view to repentance, not simply to scold him. His father reluctantly admitted his guilt, but Cain tried to cover it up by

²⁵³Bruce K. Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48:2 (Fall 1986):368. Cf. idem, *Genesis*, p. 97; Keil and Delitzsch, 1:110; Hamilton, p. 223.

²⁵⁴Ross, "Genesis," p. 34.

²⁵⁵Mathews, p. 268. I prefer this view.

²⁵⁶Thomas, et al.

²⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁵⁸Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 112.

lying. Cain was "much more hardened than the first human pair."²⁵⁹ "Sin is crouching at the door" (v.7) probably means that the power and tragic consequences of sin could master the person who opens the door to temptation (cf. 3:16).

"The consequences of his reaction to God's correction are more far-reaching than the initial sin itself, for if he pursues sin's anger, it will result in sin's mastery over him. This is his decision. It is possible for Cain to recover from sin quickly if he chooses the right thing."²⁶⁰

The Apostle John revealed the reason Cain killed Abel in 1 John 3:12: ". . . his own works were evil and his brother's righteous." Abel's attitude of faith in God resulted in righteous works that produced guilt in Cain. The seriousness of Cain's sin is clear from God's repeated references to Abel as Cain's "brother" (vv. 9, 10, 11).

"If you want to find out Cain's condition of heart you will find it after the service which he pretended to render; you know a man best out of church . . ."²⁶¹

Under the Mosaic Law, the fact that a killing took place in a field, out of the range of help, was proof of premeditation (cf. Deut. 22:25-27).

"Cain and his unrighteous offspring served as a reminder to Israel that its destiny was measured in the scales of ethical behavior."²⁶²

4:9-16 As in chapter 3, God came investigating the crime with questions (vv. 9-10).²⁶³ There the result was God cursing the ground and people generally, but here the result is His cursing Cain, another evidence that wickedness was worsening.

Cain's punishment consisted of his being banished from God's presence and unable to enjoy his family's company and the fruitfulness of a settled pastoral life (vv. 11-12, 14). He would have to wander from place to place seeking food rather than living a sedentary life. This punishment was just since he had alienated himself from his brother and God.

"Cain is not being condemned to a Bedouin-like existence; the terminology is too extreme to describe such a life-style.

²⁵⁹von Rad, p. 106.

²⁶⁰Mathews, p. 270.

²⁶¹Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible*, 1:147.

²⁶²Mathews, p. 269.

²⁶³See P. A. Riemann, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" *Interpretation* 24 (1970):482-91.

Rather it seems likely that the curse on Cain reflects the expulsion from the family that was the fate in tribal societies of those who murdered close relatives. . . . 'To be driven away from the land' (cf. v. 14) is to have all relationships, particularly with the family, broken. Moreover, it is to have one's relationship with the LORD broken . . ."264

"Nomadism according to the Sumerian flood story is a plight from which the gods rescued man; according to the Bible a nomadic existence was a judgment imposed on the first murderer. This contrast fits in with the overall optimism of Mesopotamia which believes in human progress over against the biblical picture of the inexorable advance of sin . . . It would seem likely that the other human achievements listed here—farming, metalwork, and music—are also seen by Genesis as somehow under the shadow of Cain's sin."265

Cain's response to his punishment was self-pity rather than repentance and an expression of remorse over the extent of his iniquity.²⁶⁶ No one would be his keeper (cf. v. 9).

Cain's sin resulted in his being "driven" out (v. 14; cf. 3:23). Note again that sin results in broken relationships and alienation, and alienation from God leads to fear of other people (cf. Job 15:20-25). God in grace allowed Cain and his family to continue to live under His care, but apparently without salvation. Note also that human immorality again impacted earth's ecology (cf. 3:17).

The commentators have interpreted Cain's "sign" or "mark" (v. 15) in a variety of ways.

1. **Paralysis.** This view rests on the meaning of the word used to translate "sign" in the Septuagint.
2. **The word "Yahweh."** This view originated in an ancient Jewish commentator's interpretation.²⁶⁷
3. **A long horn growing out of the middle of Cain's forehead.** This interpretation comes from another Jewish commentator,²⁶⁸ and many medieval paintings represent it.

²⁶⁴Wenham, p. 108.

²⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 98-99.

²⁶⁶See Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 98; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 114.

²⁶⁷I.e., Jonathan ben Uzziel.

²⁶⁸Rabbi Joseph.

4. **Some other identifying mark on his person, perhaps even his name.** This view sees a parallel with other marks that identify and protect their bearers to which the Bible refers (cf. Ezek. 9:4; Rev. 7:3; 13:16-18; 14:1).²⁶⁹
5. **A verification of God's promise to Cain.** The text does not identify the sign, but it was some immediate indication that God gave Cain to assure him that he would not die (cf. 21:13, 18; 27:37; 45:7, 9; 46:3 with 21:14; 44:21). This view rests on the usual meaning of "sign" in the Old Testament (cf. Judg. 6:36-40; 2 Kings 2:9-12; et al.), which the Hebrew construction supports here.²⁷⁰

Whatever it was, Cain's mark served to protect him as well as to remind him and others of his banishment. "Nod" means "wandering," so the very name of the place where he lived also reminded him of his sentence (v. 12).

"The ungodly here are portrayed as living on in the world (with a protective mark of grace . . .) without being saved. Their sense of guilt was eased by their cultural development and their geographical expansion."²⁷¹

Cain was a man who did not care to please God. Because he did not, God did not bless him as He did Abel who was a man of faith. Cain's anger and jealousy over Abel's blessing brought disaster on himself. God has preserved his example to help us avoid it. Those who worship God must have as their goal to please Him rather than letting envy and hatred ruin their lives.

3. The spread of civilization and sin 4:17-26

Cain prospered even though he rebelled against God. This is another indication of God's grace. Cain's descendants took the lead in building cities, developing music, advancing agriculture, creating weapons, and spreading civilization. However the descendants of Seth made an even more important advance, the worship of God.

The descendants of Cain 4:17-24

"By virtue of being Cain's descendants, the people named in the genealogy all inherit his curse. Thus the Cainite genealogy becomes part of the Yahwist's account of man's increasing sin."²⁷²

²⁶⁹Mathews, p. 278; Wenham, p. 109. I favor this view. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 99, believed the mark was a protective tattoo.

²⁷⁰See Bush, p. 104.

²⁷¹Ross, "Genesis," p. 33.

²⁷²R. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, p. 155.

Cain's wife (v. 17) was evidently one of his sisters or nieces (cf. 5:4). God did not prohibit marrying siblings and close relatives until the Mosaic Law.

"Because harmful mutations so greatly outnumber any supposed helpful ones, it's considered unwise nowadays (and illegal in many states) to marry someone too closely related to you. Why? Because you greatly increase the odds that bad genes will show up. By the way, you also increase the odds of bringing out really excellent trait combinations. But did you ever hear anybody say, 'Don't marry your first cousin or you'll have a genius for a child?' They don't usually say that, because the odds of something bad happening are far, far, far, far greater.

"That would not have been a problem, by the way, shortly after creation (no problem for Cain and his wife, for example). Until mutations had a chance to accumulate in the human population, no such risk of bad combinations existed."²⁷³

Lamech (v. 19) was the first bigamist. Bigamy was common in the ancient Near East, but it was never God's desire (cf. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-5). God permitted it, however, as He did many other customs of which He disapproved (e.g., divorce, marrying concubines, polygamy, etc.).

"To be sure, no rebuke from God is directed at Lamech for his violation of the marital arrangement. It is simply recorded. But that is the case with most OT illustrations of polygamy. Abraham is not condemned for cohabiting with Sarah and Hagar, nor is Jacob for marrying simultaneously Leah and Rachel. In fact, however, nearly every polygamous household [*sic*] in the OT suffers most unpleasant and shattering experiences precisely because of this ad hoc relationship. The domestic struggles that ensue are devastating."²⁷⁴

"Cain's family is a microcosm: its pattern of technical prowess and moral failure is that of humanity."²⁷⁵

God *shows* the destructive consequences of sin (cf. 2:24) more often than He *states* them in the Old Testament. Polygamy is one form of sin.

Polygamy is ". . . the symptom of an unbalanced view of marriage, which regards it as an institution in which the wife's ultimate *raison d'etre* [reason for being] is the production of children. Where God had created the woman first and foremost for partnership, society made her in effect a means to an end, even if a noble end, and wrote its view into its marriage contracts."²⁷⁶

²⁷³Gary Parker, *Creation Facts of Life*, p. 98. This is an excellent book dealing with the evidence of creation, Darwin and biologic change, and the fossil evidence. See also Ham, et al., pp. 17, 177-85.

²⁷⁴Hamilton, p. 238. Cf. Deut. 21:15-17.

²⁷⁵Kidner, p. 78.

²⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 36.

This is the first occurrence of polygamy in Genesis. We shall find several cases of it throughout the Old Testament. People practiced it widely in the ancient Near East, but it was contrary to the will of God (2:24). Beside indulging the flesh polygamy was an attempt to ensure the survival of the family by providing male successors.²⁷⁷ The presence of polygamy in Lamech's generation shows how sin escalated in the marriage relationship following the Fall.

The reference to forging (lit. sharpening) iron implements (v. 22) appears anachronistic since the smelting of iron was not common until the Iron Age, in the second millennium B.C. Perhaps this is a reference to the cold forging of meteoric iron, which was common earlier.²⁷⁸

We could paraphrase the idea in Lamech's mind as expressed in verses 23-24 more clearly as follows. "If I am threatened again, I will retaliate again, even more forcefully than Cain did." Lamech may have been claiming that he had killed in self-defense.²⁷⁹ Nevertheless he was boasting and shows himself thereby to be more barbaric than his forefather Cain (cf. Exod. 21:25). Many commentators have called Lamech's poem the "Song of the Sword." Lamech thought himself invincible with his newly acquired weapons.

"Both Cain's antediluvian lineage and the postdiluvian Babel cautioned later Israel that cities founded upon arrogance resulted in violence and ultimately destruction."²⁸⁰

The family of Seth 4:25-26

Seth's name, from the Hebrew verb translated "granted" and meaning "to set or place," expresses Eve's faith that God would continue to provide seed despite death.²⁸¹

Many commentators regarded verse 26 as the first reference to prayer as we know it in the Bible. Prayer is basic to man's relationship with God, which is a major theme in Genesis. However the phrase "call on the name of the Lord" usually refers to proclamation rather than prayer in the Pentateuch.²⁸² Here it probably refers to the beginning of public worship of Yahweh.

²⁷⁷For a good, brief introduction to polygamy, see M. Stephen Davis, "Polygamy in the Ancient World," *Biblical Illustrator* 14:1 (Fall 1987):34-36.

²⁷⁸*The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Mining and Metals," by A. Stuart; Mathews, p. 287; Hamilton, p. 239.

²⁷⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 115. The seventh generations from Adam through Cain and Seth, ungodly Lamech (vv. 19-24) and godly Enoch (5:24), stand in sharp contrast to each other. The former man inflicts death, and the latter does not die.

²⁸⁰Mathews, pp. 282-83.

²⁸¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 101.

²⁸²Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 169.

"Gen 4 concludes the story of mankind that was cut off in the flood, a tale that opened with Gen 2:4, 'This is the history. . . .' With the aid of a genealogy from Adam to Lamek, the seventh generation, it traces the development of technology and arts on the one hand and the growth of violence on the other. Only in the last two verses introducing the descendants of Seth do we have glimmers of hope, for from him, as chap. 5 will describe, descended Noah, the survivor of the flood, and it was in Enosh's day that the public worship of God was reintroduced."²⁸³

Chapter 4 also teaches that it is important for the righteous to preserve the knowledge of God when they live in an ungodly society.

C. WHAT BECAME OF ADAM 5:1—6:8

The primary purpose of this second *toledot* section appears to be to link the generations of Adam and Noah. The cursed human race continued to multiply, and human beings continued to die. Yet the record of Enoch gives hope.

"Genealogies in this book of genealogies . . . serve several purposes, depending in part on the nature of the genealogy. *Broad* genealogies present only the first generation of descendants (e.g., "the sons of Leah . . . the sons of Rachel . . ." in Gen. 35:23-26; cf. 6:9-10; 25:13-15). *Deep* genealogies list sequential descendants, in this book usually numbering from two to ten. (There are ten generations from Adam through Seth to Noah. In the eleventh generation the genealogy becomes segmented.) *Linear* genealogies display only depth (e.g., "Cain . . . gave birth to Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad . . ." 4:17-18; cf. 5:1-31; 11:10-26; 36:31-39, 40). *Segmented* genealogies display both depth and breadth (e.g., "This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth. . . . The sons of Japheth: Gomer . . . The sons of Gomer . . ." 10:1-29; cf. 11:27-29; 19:36-38; 25:19-26; 36:1-5, 10-30; 46:8-25). The distinctions of broad, deep, linear, and segmented genealogies help explain the various functions of genealogies."²⁸⁴

"Genesis begins the process of identifying the seed that will rule the earth (Gen. 1:26-28) and crush the Serpent (3:15). Book 2 [5:1—6:8] traces that lineage from Adam to Noah, even as the matching ten-generation genealogy of Book 5 [11:10-26] traces it from Shem to Abraham. Book 2 concludes with the progressive and rapid hardening of sin and the inability of the godly seed of the woman on its own to reverse it. Sin, like the Serpent, is too strong for them. Clearly, both God's judgment and deliverance are needed."²⁸⁵

²⁸³Wenham, p. 116.

²⁸⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 105. See David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, pp. 249-50; M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, pp. 77-82.

²⁸⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 109.

1. The effects of the curse on humanity ch. 5

There are at least three purposes for the inclusion of this genealogy, which contains 10 paragraphs (vv. 1-5, 6-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-17, 18-20, 21-24, 25-27, 28-31, and 32).

1. It shows the development of the human race from Adam to Noah and bridges the gap in time between these two major individuals.²⁸⁶

"The genealogies [in chapters 5 and 11] are exclusionist in function, indicating by linear descent the one through whom the promissory blessing will be channeled."²⁸⁷

2. It demonstrates the veracity of God's word when He said that people would die as a result of sin (cf. 2:17). Note the recurrence of the phrase "and he died" (vv. 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, and 31).
3. It contrasts the progress of the godly line of Seth culminating in Enoch who walked with God and experienced translation (5:6-24) with the development of the ungodly line of Cain. Cain's branch of the human race culminated in Lamech who was a brutal bigamist (4:16-24).

"The author's return to the theme of God's 'blessing' man (cf. v. 2) is also a part of his overall scheme to cast God's purposes for man in terms that will recall a father's care for his children. Throughout the remainder of the Book of Genesis, a recurring theme is that of the father's blessing his children (9:26-27; 27:27; 48:15; 49:1-28). In keeping with such a theme, the author shows at each crucial turning point in the narrative that God himself renewed his blessing to the next generation of sons (1:28; 5:2; 9:1; 12:3; 24:11). Seen as a whole, the picture that emerges is that of a loving father insuring the future well-being of his children through the provision of an inherited blessing. In this way the author has laid a theological foundation for the rest of Scripture. God's original plan of blessing for all humanity, though thwarted by human folly, will nevertheless be restored through the seed of the woman (3:15), the seed of Abraham (12:3), and the 'Lion of the tribe of Judah' (49:8-12; cf. Rev 5:5-13). It is on this same foundation that the apostle Paul built his view of Jesus as the one through whom God has 'blessed us' (Eph 1:3) and 'adopted us as his sons' (v. 5) so that 'we have obtained an inheritance' (v. 11, KJV) from the one we may call '*Abba*, Father' (Rom 8:15)."²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶R. K. Harrison, "From Adam to Noah: A Reconsideration of the Antediluvian Patriarchs' Ages," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:2 (June 1994):161-68, argued that the ages of these patriarchs were inflated to glorify them. I think not.

²⁸⁷Mathews, p. 298.

²⁸⁸Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 70-71.

Some commentators have seen evidence in the text that this genealogy is not complete.²⁸⁹

1. The word "father" can just as accurately be translated "ancestor" (v. 3, et al.). It does not require a literal father-son relationship.²⁹⁰
2. The fact that Lamech, the sixth name in Cain's list (4:16-24), corresponds to Enoch, the sixth name in Seth's list (5:6-24), is suggestive. It indicates that God wanted to point out the contrast between the generations of these two sons of Adam. One was ungodly and the other godly. This purpose seems to some writers more dominant than that God wanted simply to preserve a complete record of all the generations between Adam and Noah. Lamech and Enoch were each the seventh generation, as recorded in this list, from Adam (cf. Jude 14). Matthew 1:1-17 contains another genealogy in which 14 men from each of three historical periods appear and it, too, may not be complete.
3. The writer did not list Noah's sons in the order of their birth (cf. 5:32 and 9:24).
4. The genealogy in chapter 11 may not be complete.²⁹¹

The careful recording of the age of each man when he fathered the next man in the list strongly suggests that this list is complete. Furthermore the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1:1-4 and Luke 3:36-38 are identical to the one in Genesis 5. There are probably no missing generations.²⁹²

"The genealogy of Seth in Genesis 5 is thus intended to take up the creation story which had reached its first climax in the creation, as we would now read it, of Adam. The elemental orderliness of the genealogy continues the order begun at creation; indeed, it reaffirms that order after the threatened slide back into chaos narrated in the intervening chapters. But the genealogy does more; it imparts movement to creation. The Genesis 1 creation story is essentially static. When God rests on the seventh day, all phyla of creation are in their proper order and the earth is at rest. There is little suggestion of movement or further development, no story to be traced. The sole dynamic elements lie in God's command to newly created humanity to 'be fruitful and multiply' and 'subdue the earth.' The genealogies document the fruitfulness of humanity and thus become the expression of the fulfillment of God's mandate, providing movement away from the steady state of creation but at the same time preserving its orderliness. Creation's order advanced through the genealogy.

²⁸⁹E.g., Mathews, p. 305.

²⁹⁰See Kenneth Kitchen, *The Bible In Its World*, p. 33.

²⁹¹See my comments on 11:12. For defense of the view that the Scriptures do not fix and were not intended to fix the dates of any events before the time of Abraham, see W. H. Green, "Primeval Chronology," in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 13-28; and B. B. Warfield, "On the Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race," *Princeton Theological Review* 9:1 (January 1911):1-25.

²⁹²See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:120-27. Wenham, pp. 130-34, wrote an excursus on the ages of the antediluvians that is the best discussion of this issue that I have found.

"Connection of the genealogy to creation also exerts a reciprocal influence on our understanding of this and subsequent genealogies. The genealogies represent the continuation of creation's fundamental order through time. As a result, they assume theological significance. The organic and orderly succession of generations is not an expression of thematically empty biological necessity but of God's initial creative activity. Birth awakens not neutral destiny but enrollment in the continuing order of creation ordained by God. The genealogies become bearers of the creation theme and, by their elemental, organic nature, its fit expression."²⁹³

Even though the death motif is strong in this chapter there is even more emphasis on God's grace. We see this in the references to life, fertility (sons and daughters), Enoch's translation, and other blessings. The enjoyment of God's blessings depends on walking with God. "Walk" is a biblical figure for fellowship and obedience that results in divine blessing (cf. 1 Sam. 15:25).

"Enoch is pictured as one who did not suffer the fate of Adam ('you shall surely die') because, unlike the others, he 'walked with God.'

"The sense of the author is clear. Enoch is an example of one who found life amid the curse of death. In Enoch the author is able to show that the pronouncement of death is not the last word that need be said about a person's life. One can find life if one 'walks with God.'"²⁹⁴

"'Walked with God' is metaphorical and indicates that Enoch had a lifestyle characterized by his devotion to God. The sense of 'walk' (*halak*) in its verbal stem indicates a communion or intimacy with God."²⁹⁵

"The double repetition of the phrase 'walked with God' indicates Enoch was outstanding in this pious family."²⁹⁶

The central lesson of the section appears to be that the godly can experience victory over the effects of the curse by walking with God.²⁹⁷

²⁹³Robert B. Robinson, "Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (October 1986):600-601.

²⁹⁴Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 118. Cf. 3:8; 6:9; 15:6; 17:1; 24:40; 48:15; Deut. 30:15-16; Mic. 6:8; Mal. 2:6. See Timothy J. Cole, "Enoch, a Man Who Walked with God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:591 (July-September 1991):288-97.

²⁹⁵Mathews, p. 313. Cf. 3:8; 6:9.

²⁹⁶Wenham, p. 127.

²⁹⁷For additional study of the genealogies, see Kenneth Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, pp. 36-39; Schaeffer, pp. 122-124; Kidner; "Chronology" in *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible; International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Antediluvian Patriarchs," by John J. Davis; James L. Hayward and Donald E. Casebolt, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11: a statistical study," *Origins* 9:2 (1982):75-81; Frederick Cryer, "The Interrelationships of Gen. 5, 32; 11, 10-11 and the Chronology of the Flood," *Biblica* 66:2 (1985):241-61; and Barr, pp. 584-85.

"The finality of death caused by sin, and so powerfully demonstrated in the genealogy of Genesis, is in fact not so final. Man was not born to die; he was born to live, and that life comes by walking with God. . . . Walking with God is the key to the chains of the curse."²⁹⁸

"Within the time-scale of Genesis, this chapter [5] covers the longest period in world history."²⁹⁹

As the story of Cain and Abel (4:3-24) interrupted the genealogy of Adam in 4:1-2 and 25-26, so the story of the Flood (6:1—9:27) interrupts the genealogy of Noah in 5:32 and 9:28-29.

2. God's sorrow over man's wickedness 6:1-8

As wickedness increased on the earth God determined to destroy the human race with the exception of those few people to whom He extended grace.

"Stories of a great flood sent in primeval times by gods to destroy mankind followed by some form of new creation are so common to so many peoples in different parts of the world, between whom no kind of historical contact seems possible, that the notion seems almost to be a universal feature of the human imagination."³⁰⁰

There were two major reasons for the flood: the sins of the sons of God (vv. 1-4) and the sins of humankind generally (vv. 5-8).

The sins of the sons of God 6:1-4

6:1-2 There are three major views about the identity of the sons of God.

1. They were **fallen angels** who married women.³⁰¹ Arguments in favor of this view follow with responses.
 - a. The term "sons of God" as it occurs here in Hebrew refers only to angels in the Old Testament (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; et al.). **Response.** Angels do not reproduce (Matt. 22:30).
 - b. 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6-7 appear to identify angels with this incident. **Response.** There are no other references to angels in the context here in Genesis. These New Testament passages probably refer to the fall of Satan.

²⁹⁸Cole, p. 294.

²⁹⁹Wenham, p. 145.

³⁰⁰Whybray, p. 45.

³⁰¹*The Book of Enoch* (a second century B.C. pseudepigrapha); Philo; Josephus; Justin Martyr; Tertullian; Cyprian; Ambrose; Pember; Clarence Larkin *The Spirit World*; Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*; C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil*; M. R. DeHaan, *508 Answers to Bible Questions*; Boice; R. S. Hendel, "When the Sons of God Cavorted with the Daughters of Men," *Bible Review* 3:2 (Summer 1987):8-13, 37; Merrill, p. 23; Wenham, pp. 140, 146; et al.

- c. If God could impregnate Mary, spirit beings may be able to do the same thing to human women. **Response.** Spirit beings cannot do everything that God can do.
2. They were **godly Sethites** who married ungodly women.³⁰² Arguments in favor of this view follow with responses.
 - a. The Old Testament often refers to the godly as God's sons (e.g., Exod. 4:22). **Response.** This would have to be an exception to the technical use of "sons of God" as a reference to angels in the Old Testament.
 - b. Moses had already established the concept of a godly line in Genesis (4:26).
 - c. Sonship based on election is common in the Old Testament.
 - d. Warnings against marriages between believers and unbelievers are common in the Pentateuch.
 3. They were **dynastic rulers** who married women.³⁰³ Fallen angels (demons) may have indwelt or at least controlled them.³⁰⁴ Arguments in favor of this view and responses follow.
 - a. Ancient Near Eastern literature often called kings sons of gods.
 - b. The Old Testament refers to administrators (e.g., judges) as gods. **Response.** Scripture never regards them as descendants of deities as pagan ancient Near Eastern literature does.
 - c. This story is similar to Babylonian antediluvian stories.

Scholars have debated this passage heatedly, but there is not yet decisive evidence that enables us to make a dogmatic decision as to the correct interpretation.

"What does he [Moses] mean? I do not know, and I do not believe anyone knows. So far as I am concerned, this passage is unintelligible."³⁰⁵

³⁰²Augustine; Keil and Delitzsch; Henry; Scofield; J. S. Baxter, *Explore the Book*; Leupold; J. P. Lange, *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*; Thomas; Pentecost; Mathews; et al. I prefer this view.

³⁰³John Skinner, *Genesis*; Kitchen, "The Old . . .," p. 4; et al. See Watson E. Mills, "Sons of God: The Roman View," *Biblical Illustrator* (Fall 1983):37-39.

³⁰⁴Ross, "Genesis," p. 36; Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 116-17.

³⁰⁵Albertus Pieters, *Notes on Genesis*, p. 116.

Context is very important in any interpretive problem, and I believe it argues for view 2 in this case.³⁰⁶

Those who believe that the angelic conflict is a major theme of Scripture have emphasized this passage. I do not believe that it is. I believe the angels are important primarily because of their function as God's messengers sent forth to minister to people (Heb. 1:14).

6:3 The "120 years" are evidently the years that God would give humankind before the flood. They probably do not indicate a reduction in the normal human lifespan to 120 years.³⁰⁷

"The judgment is that God will not endlessly and forever permit his life-giving spirit to enliven those who disorder his world. The breath of life (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 104:29-30) remains his to give and to recall."³⁰⁸

"The attempt by man to become more than he is results in his becoming less."³⁰⁹

6:4 The "nephilim" were on the earth before and after the marriages of the "sons of God" with the "daughters of men." They were literally "fallen ones" or "tyrants."³¹⁰ They were "mighty . . . men of renown." That is, they were powerful individuals, probably military leaders. Moses later described the giants in Canaan as "nephilim" (Num. 13:33).

The sins of humanity generally 6:5-8

The second reason for the flood was the sinfulness of humanity generally.

6:5 Men's and women's actions were very wicked and their thoughts and affections were completely evil by this time (cf. vv. 11-12; Rom. 1:18-32).

"Near the turn of the 19th century F. W. Farrar wrote a book entitled *Seekers After God*. The book was a popular seller and was in considerable demand. A certain western bookseller had a number of requests for the volume but had no copies available. He sent a telegram to the dealers in New York requesting them to ship him a number of the books. After awhile a telegram came back which read, 'No seekers after God in New York. Try Philadelphia.'"³¹¹

³⁰⁶See Keil and Delitzsch, 131-34. Many conservative interpreters hold this view.

³⁰⁷Mathews, p. 335; Westermann, p. 376; Wenham, pp. 142, 146-47; et al. defended the second view.

³⁰⁸Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 72.

³⁰⁹L. Eslinger, "A Contextual Identification of the *bene ha'elohim* and *benoth ha'adam* in Genesis 6:1-4," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 13 (1979):72.

³¹⁰Luther.

³¹¹D. Edmond Hiebert, *Working with God: Scriptural Studies in Intercession*, pp. 100-101.

6:6-7 God was sorry that He had made humankind because people generally did not want a relationship with God. They insisted on living life independent of God and consequently destroying themselves in sin. He was sorry over what His special creation had become.

"God is no robot. We know him as a personal, living God, not a static principle, who while having transcendent purposes to be sure also engages intimately with his creation. Our God is incomparably affected by, even pained by, the sinner's rebellion. Acknowledging the passibility (emotions) of God does not diminish the immutability of his promissory purposes. Rather, his feelings and actions toward men, such as judgment or forgiveness, are always inherently consistent with his essential person and just and gracious resolve (Jas 1:17)."³¹²

6:8 Noah was the one exception.³¹³ "Favor" is grace. This is the first mention of this word in the Old Testament, though we have seen many examples of God's grace thus far. There is a word play in the Hebrew text (an anagram). The same consonants of Noah's name (*nh*) in the reverse order mean "grace" (*hn*).

All God's people can identify with Noah, the recipient of God's grace. It is only by God's grace that we can escape His judgment on the wicked.

"Genesis is flatly contradicting the humanistic optimism of Mesopotamia: humanity's situation in its view is hopeless without divine mercy."³¹⁴

This section shows that pagan idolatry and immorality pain God and incur His judgment that man can only escape by His provision of salvation.

D. WHAT BECAME OF NOAH 6:9—9:29

The Lord destroyed the corrupt, violent human race and deluged its world, but He used righteous Noah to preserve life and establish a new world after the Flood.

"Noah's experience presents decisively the author's assertion that the Lord judges human sin but provides a means for perpetuating the creation blessing (1:26-28) and the salvation hope for an elect seed (3:15). The recurring theme of blessing, threatened by sin but preserved by divine mercy, is found in the two narratives that make up the Noah *toledot*: the flood story (6:9—9:17) and the account of the patriarch's drunkenness

³¹²Mathews, p. 344.

³¹³"Noah" may mean "grieved" (the Hebrew *niphal* form) or "comfort" (the *piel* form).

³¹⁴Wenham, p. xlviii.

(9:20-27). The former is worldwide in scope, and the latter is its microcosm. A genealogical note binds the two (9:18-19), and another concludes it (9:28-29). . . .

"Also Noah's *toledot* contributes to the broader concerns of early Genesis by preparing the reader for the postdiluvian world. This 'new world' is the setting for understanding the perpetuation of the 'blessing' by the patriarchs (11:27—50:26), which is the main deliberation of Genesis."³¹⁵

1. The Flood 6:9—8:22

The chiasmic (palistropic, crossing) structure of this section shows that Moses intended to emphasize God's grace to Noah.

"One mark of the coherence of the flood narrative is to be found in its literary structure. The tale is cast in the form of an extended palistrophe, that is a structure that turns back on itself. In a palistrophe the first item matches the final item, the second item matches the penultimate item, and so on. The second half of the story is thus a mirror image of the first. This kind of literary structure has been discovered in other parts of Genesis, but nowhere else is it developed on such a large scale. This may be partly due to the fact that a flood narrative is peculiarly suited to this literary form. . . .

"Particularly striking are the references to days (lines H, I, L, O). (Only the references to days form part of the palistrophe; the 40 days *and nights* [vii 4, 12] and the dates do not.) The periods of time form a symmetrical pattern, 7, 7, 40, 150, 150, 40, 7, 7. The turning point of the narrative is found in viii:1 'God remembered Noah.'

"What then is the function of the palistrophe? Firstly, it gives literary expression to the character of the flood event. The rise and fall of the waters is mirrored in the rise and fall of the key words in its description. Secondly, it draws attention to the real turning point in the saga: viii 1, 'And God remembered Noah.' From that moment the waters start to decline and the earth to dry out. It was God's intervention that was decisive in saving Noah, and the literary structure highlights this fact."³¹⁶

The following diagram illustrates this palistrophe simply.

³¹⁵Mathews, pp. 349-50.

³¹⁶Gordon J. Wenham, "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 28:3 (1978):337, 339-40. See also idem, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 155-58. There is a helpful chart of the chronology of the Flood in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 39.

- "Introduction: Noah's righteousness and Noah's sons (6:9-10).
A God resolves to destroy the corrupt race (6:11-13).
B Noah builds an ark according to God's instructions (6:14-22).
C The Lord commands the remnant to enter the ark (7:1-9).
D The flood begins (7:10-16).
E The flood prevails 150 days and the water covers the mountains (7:17-24).
F God remembers Noah (8:1a).
E' The flood recedes 150 days, and the mountains are visible (8:1b-5).
D' The earth dries (8:6-14).
C' God commands the remnant to leave the ark (8:15-19).
B' Noah builds an altar (8:20).
A' The Lord resolves not to destroy humankind (8:21-22)."³¹⁷

Conditions and events before the Flood 6:9—7:10

6:9-12 "The same explanation for Enoch's rescue from death ('he walked with God') is made the basis for Noah's rescue from death in the Flood: 'he walked with God' (6:9). Thus in the story of Noah and the Flood, the author is able to repeat the lesson of Enoch: life comes through 'walking with God.'"³¹⁸

"Noah is depicted as Adam *redivivus* (revived). He is the sole survivor and successor to Adam; both 'walk' with God; both are the recipients of the promissory blessing; both are caretakers of the lower creatures; both father three sons; both are workers of the soil; both sin through the fruit of a tree; and both father a wicked son who is under a curse."³¹⁹

"The two words, 'corrupt' and 'violence,' give us respectively the character and expression of the sin, the cause and the effect [v. 11]. The corruption has led to violence, for badness always leads to cruelty in one form or another. A life that is wrong with God necessarily becomes wrong with its fellows."³²⁰

"Whereas God has blessed the human family with the power of procreation to fill the earth (1:28; 9:1), these

³¹⁷Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 191. See also the charts in Mathews, p. 354; and Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 125.

³¹⁸Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 119. This is the first time "righteous" and "blameless" appear in the Bible.

³¹⁹Mathews, p. 351, cf. p. 359. See Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 127-30; and Warren Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis*, pp. 9-15, for striking parallels between Adam and Noah and between the prediluvian and postdiluvian worlds.

³²⁰Thomas, p. 71.

culprits have 'filled the earth' by procreating 'violence' (cf. v. 13; Ezek 8:17; 28:16)."³²¹

6:13-16 Notice again that the earth and nature suffer because of human sin (cf. 3:17-19; 4:12; Rom. 8:20-21).

Noah received detailed instructions that he was to follow in building the ark. Later Moses received detailed instructions that he was to follow in building the tabernacle. Both men followed their respective instructions and received praise (v. 22; Exod. 39:42-43; Lev. 8:36; Num. 27:22; Deut. 34:9). Both men inaugurated a new epoch. In this respect Moses was another Noah.

"God must be obeyed in all his instructions if his people expect to enjoy the fruit of life and blessing (e.g., Deut 26:16-19; 28:1-14)."³²²

The ark was about 450 feet long (1 1/2 American football fields), 75 feet wide (7 parking spaces), and 45 feet high (a four-story building). It had three decks and over 100,000 square feet of deck space. There were over 1 million cubic feet of space in it. This is the capacity of approximately 860 railroad boxcars. It had a capacity of almost 14,000 gross tons.³²³

The ark probably looked more like a rectangular box than a ship. After all, its purpose was to stay afloat, not travel from one destination to another. This design uses space very efficiently. The ark would have been very stable in the water. Modern ocean-going tankers and aircraft carriers have a similar scale of dimensions. The wood out of which Noah made it is unknown. The Hebrew word occurs only here in the Old Testament.

6:17-21 This is the first occurrence of the word "covenant" (Heb. *berith*) in the Old Testament (v. 18). There were two basic kinds of covenants in the ancient Near East.³²⁴

1. The **parity covenant** was one that equals made. Examples: Abraham and Abimelech (21:22-32), Isaac and Abimelech (26:26-33), and Jacob and Laban (31:44-54).
2. The **suzerainty covenant** was one that a superior (king) made with an inferior (vassal). Examples: the Noahic Covenant (Gen. 9:1-17), the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:18-21), the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 19—Num. 10), et al.

³²¹Mathews, p. 359.

³²²Ibid., p. 363.

³²³See "Noah's Flood: Washing Away Millions of Years" DVD featuring Dr. Terry Mortenson.

³²⁴G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment*, pp. 153-154.

"The Noahic covenant is closer to the royal grant known from the ancient Near East where a deity bestows a benefit or gift upon a king. It has its closest parallels to the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Gen 15; 17; 2 Sam 7), which are promissory charters made by God with the individuals and their offspring, characteristically forever. Unlike the Mosaic covenant, in the royal grant form of covenant God alone is under compulsion by oath to uphold his promise to the favored party."³²⁵

6:22 We can see Noah's faith (Heb. 11:7) in his complete obedience to God even though he faced many obstacles.

"The author's purpose in drawing out the list of specifications for the ark in chapter 6, as with the details of the building of the tabernacle, is not that readers might be able to see what the ark or the tabernacle looked like, but rather that readers might appreciate the meticulous care with which these godly and exemplary individuals went about their tasks of obedience to God's will. They obeyed God with 'all their hearts.'"³²⁶

"What a splendid figure this man makes, a picture of solitary goodness! He was the one saint of that day. It is possible, therefore, to be good even though we have to stand alone. It is possible to be right with God even amidst surrounding iniquity. God is the same today as He was to Noah, and if only we are willing to fulfill the conditions we too shall walk with God and please Him."³²⁷

7:1-10 God graciously invited Noah to enter the ark with his family (v. 1). This is the first occurrence of the offer "come" in the Bible. This invitation continues throughout Scripture, the last offer being in Revelation 22:17. God extends the invitation to people, He urges them to take advantage of the perfect provision He has made for their preservation, and He offers it in a time of impending judgment and gloom.

"It is not that Noah's works of righteousness gains [*sic*] him salvation, for none is cited. Rather, his upright character is noted to condemn his generation, which merits death."³²⁸

"Sinful men do not *deserve* to live on God's earth. This is the basic message of the Genesis Flood."³²⁹

³²⁵Mathews, p. 368.

³²⁶Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 125.

³²⁷Thomas, p. 74.

³²⁸Mathews, p. 371.

³²⁹John C. Whitcomb, *Esther: The Triumph of God's Sovereignty*, p. 21.

God did not reveal the basis for His distinction between clean and unclean animals here (v. 2). Israel's pagan neighbors also observed clean and unclean distinctions between animals though they varied from country to country. In the Mosaic Law, God further distinguished between foods. Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul taught that now these distinctions no longer need affect people as far as our relationship to God goes (Mark 7:15, 18-19; cf. Acts 10:15; 11:9; Rom. 14:14).

The Flood proper 7:11-24

There are two views among evangelicals as to the extent of the Flood.

1. **A universal flood.** Evidence:

- a. The purpose of the Flood (6:5-7, 11-13).
- b. The need for an ark (6:14).
- c. The size of the ark (6:15-16).
- d. The universal terms used in the story (6:17-21; 7:19, 21-23). Context must determine whether universal terms are truly universal or limited (cf. Luke 2:1; Matt. 28:19-20).
- e. The amount of water involved (7:11, 20; 8:2).
- f. The duration of the Flood: 371 days (7:11; 8:14).
- g. The testimony of Peter (2 Pet. 3:3-7).
- h. The faithfulness of God (8:21).

This view has been the most popular with conservative interpreters throughout history.

"By and large, the tradition of the Christian church is that the context requires a universal flood, and many Christian scholars have maintained this position knowing well the geological difficulties it raises."³³⁰

2. **A local flood.** Evidence:

- a. The main arguments rest on modern geology and the improbability of a universal flood in view of consequent global changes.
- b. Advocates take the universal statements in the text as limited to the area where Moses said the Flood took place.

This view has gained wide acceptance since the modern science of geology has called in question the credibility of the text.

³³⁰Davis, p. 124. See Whitcomb and Morris; Boice, pp. 278-88; Ariel A. Roth, "Evidences for a worldwide flood," *Ministry* (May 1984), pp. 12-14; and Donald Patten, "The Biblical Flood: A Geographical Perspective," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:509 (January-March 1971):36-49.

"The principle concern of those advocating a local flood is to escape the geological implications of a universal flood."³³¹

Basically, this controversy, like that involving the creation account, involves presuppositions about the credibility of Scripture or science and the possibility of supernatural occurrences. The scientific community is more open to catastrophism of some kind than it used to be.³³²

Some interpreters have understood the opening of the "floodgates of the sky" (v. 11) as a breaking up of a water vapor canopy that some say covered the earth before the Flood.³³³ Advocates of this "canopy theory" believe that it may account for longevity before the Flood.

"The water for Noah's Flood came from the release of great underground sources of water (the fountains of the great deep which continued pouring forth for 150 days), and from the collapse of the waters above (presumably a vast water vapor blanket or canopy above the atmosphere), giving the 40 days and nights of rain. Psalm 104 indicates that after the Flood, the mountains were upthrust to their present positions, with associated deepening of the ocean basins, which now hold the waters of the Flood.

"These waters would not have been enough to cover today's highest mountains. Genesis indicates no rain or rainbows before the Flood, which is consistent with the absence of high mountains that are important to the triggering of rainfall. Also, the absence of large temperature differences between poles and equator under such a greenhouse blanket of water vapor would mean an absence of the vast winds which are also necessary (now, but not before the Flood) for the rainfall cycle. Genesis describes how the earth before the Flood was watered by mists and/or springs and geysers."³³⁴

"We have shown earlier that the flood narrative points ahead to Moses and the escape of the Hebrews through the Red Sea. This is evidenced again

³³¹Davis, p. 124. See Ramm, pp. 229-40; Kidner; et al.; who advocate this view. For an explanation of the fossil record from a person who holds the universal flood viewpoint, see John R. Woodmorappe, "A Diluviological Treatise on the Stratigraphic Separation of Fossils," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* (December 1983):133-85. He wrote, p. 135, "Since the distorted concept of special creation used by the originator of the geologic column was never truly Creationistic, and organic evolution has long since become the conceptual basis for time-equivalence of index fossils, modern Creationists can justifiably point out that organic evolution *is* the basis for the geological column."

³³²See Henry Morris, "Biblical Catastrophism and Modern Science," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:498 (April-June 1968):107-15. An interesting article on some ancient non-biblical accounts of the Flood is Jack P. Lewis, "Noah and the Flood in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Tradition," *Biblical Archaeologist* 47:4 (December 1984):224-39. See also J. Randall O'Brien, "Flood Stories of the Ancient Near East," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):60-65.

³³³See my comments on 2:5-6.

³³⁴Ham, et al., p. 15. Cf. also pp. 117-29 for further discussion.

by the term 'dry land' (*haraba*) in our passage (v. 22) rather than the customary 'dry ground' (*yabasa*). This infrequent term occurs eight times, only once more in the Pentateuch at Exod 14:21, where it describes the transformation of the sea into 'dry land' by a 'strong east wind.' This exodus parallel is confirmed by 8:1b, which speaks of God's sending a 'wind' upon the waters. Later Israel identified itself with Noah and the tiny group of survivors who escaped the wicked by the awesome deeds of God."³³⁵

The aftermath of the Flood ch. 8

8:1-5 When Moses wrote that God remembered someone (v. 1), he meant God extended mercy to him or her by delivering that person from death (here; cf. 19:29) or from barrenness (30:22).³³⁶ God's rescue of Noah foreshadows His deliverance of Israel in the Exodus (cf. 8:13-14 and Exod. 2:24; 14:21).³³⁷

"Ararat,' known as ancient Urartu in Assyrian records, was an extensive territory and bordered the northern Mesopotamian region. It reached its political zenith in the ninth to sixth centuries B.C. Urartu surrounded Lake Van with boundaries taking in southeast Turkey, southern Russia, and northwest Iran. Among the mountains of modern Armenia is the impressive peak known today as Mount Ararat, some seventeen thousand feet in elevation, which the Turks call Byk Ari Da. 'Mount Ararat' as a geographical designation comes from later tradition. During the eleventh to twelfth centuries A.D., it became the traditional site known as the place of Noah's landing. Verse 4, however, does not specify a peak and refers generally to its location as the 'mountains of Ararat.' . . . The search for the ark's artifacts has been both a medieval and a modern occupation; but to the skeptic such evidence is not convincing, and to the believer, while not irrelevant, it is not necessary to faith."³³⁸

Modern Mt. Ararat lies on the border between Turkey and Armenia near the center of the ancient world. From this general region Noah's descendants spread out over the earth.³³⁹

³³⁵Mathews, pp. 381-82.

³³⁶Hamilton, p. 299.

³³⁷Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 127; idem, "Genesis," p. 89.

³³⁸Mathews, pp. 385-86.

³³⁹For a history of the evidence that Noah's ark is still on Mt. Ararat, see Boice, pp. 263-65. See also Tim LaHaye and John Morris, *The Ark on Mt. Ararat*, or Violet Cummings, *Has Anybody Really Seen Noah's Ark?*

8:6-14 "The raven in seeking food settles upon every carcass it sees, whereas the dove will only settle on what is dry and clean."³⁴⁰

Doves (v. 8), white, clean animals (Lev. 1:14; 12:6; et al.) in contrast to black, unclean animals (Lev. 11:15; Deut. 14:14), return to their home when they find no place to land.

"The olive tree will put out leaves even under water."³⁴¹

8:15-19 There are many interesting thematic parallels between God's calling Noah out of the ark and God's calling Abraham out of Ur (cf. 8:15 and 12:1; 8:16 and 12:1; 8:18 and 12:4; 8:20 and 12:7; 9:1 and 12:2; 9:9 and 12:7).

"Both Noah and Abraham represent new beginnings in the course of events recorded in Genesis. Both are marked by God's promise of blessing and his gift of the covenant."³⁴²

Verse 15 introduces the third dispensation, the dispensation of human government. When Noah and his family stepped out of the ark to begin life on earth anew, God laid down new rules for humanity including a new test. Previously no one had the right to take another human life (cf. 4:10-11, 14-15, 23-24). Now, though man's direct moral responsibility to God continued, God delegated to man certain areas of His authority. Man was now to express his obedience to God not only by obeying God directly but also by obeying the human authorities God would set over him, namely, human governors (cf. Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-2).

The highest function of human government is the protection of human life. God now specified that human beings were not to avenge murder individually but to do so as a corporate group, to practice capital punishment, to safeguard the sanctity of human life. Human life is a gift from God that people should not dispose of except as God permits. Restraint on man in the preceding dispensation was internal (6:3), God's Spirit working through moral responsibility. But now a new external restraint was added, the influence and power of civil government.

Unfortunately, man failed to rule his fellowman righteously. Civil leaders have abused their function as God's vice-regents by ruling for themselves rather than for God. Examples are the failures at Babel (11:9), in Israel's theocracy (2 Chron. 36:15-21), and in "the times of the Gentiles" (Dan. 2:31-45). The glorious reign of Jesus Christ over the earth will supersede man's rule eventually. The dispensation of human government ended as a

³⁴⁰Keil and Delitzsch, 1:149.

³⁴¹Ibid.

³⁴²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 91.

specific test of human obedience when God called Abraham to be His instrument of blessing to the whole world (12:2). Nevertheless man's responsibility for government did not end then but will continue until Christ sets up His kingdom on the earth.

Verses 18 and 19 may seem like needless repetition to the modern reader, but they underline Noah's obedience to God's words, which Moses stressed in the entire Flood narrative.

8:20-22 Noah's "altar" is the first mentioned in the Bible. His "burnt offerings" were for worship. Some of the burnt offerings in the Mosaic system of worship were for the same purpose. Specifically a burnt offering made atonement and expressed the offerer's complete personal devotion to God (cf. Lev. 1; Rom. 12:1-2). As the head of the new humanity, Noah's sacrifice represented all mankind.

God may judge the wicked catastrophically and begin a new era of existence with faithful believers.

| COMPARISON OF FLOOD STORIES³⁴³ | | | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | Biblical | Berossus (Greek) | Atrahasis (Akkadian) | Gilgamesh (Akkadian) | Sumerian |
| Date of Account | Earliest possible: 15th century B.C. | ca. 275 BC | 16th century (copy of earlier work) | ca. 1500 B.C. (copies, not the original) | 19th century B.C. (copy, not the original) |
| Author of Flood | Yahweh | | Enlil | Council of gods | Assembly of gods |
| Intercessor | Yahweh | Kronos | Ea | Ea | Enki (probably) |
| Reason for Flood | Wickedness of mankind, violence, corruption. | | The clamor, uproar of man disturbs Enlil's sleep. | No reason given at first. In the end, the "sin of man" implied as the cause. | None given. |
| Hero | Noah (rest) | Xisouthros (Greek for Ziusudra) | Atrahasis (all wise) | Utnapishtim (finder of life) | Ziusudra (he saw life) |
| Intended for Whom | All mankind. | | All mankind. | City of Shurippak particularly, but all mankind. | All mankind. |

³⁴³From O'Brien, pp. 62-63. See also Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 159-66; and Kerry L. Hawkins, "The Theology of the Flood," *Seminary Review* 34:2 (December 1988):69-88.

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|
| Reason Hero Spared | "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." "A righteous man. Blameless. Walked with God." | | | | Ziusudra was "humbly obedient," reverent; one who seeks revelation by dreams and incantations. |
| Means of Escape | Ark | Boat | Large ship | Ship | Huge boat |
| Description | Detailed: 3 stories, 1 door, 1 window at least. | | (Text destroyed) | Detailed: 6 stories, 1 door, 1 window at least. | |
| Occupants | Noah, wife, 3 sons, their wives. 7 pairs of all clean animals (male and female). 1 pair of all unclean animals (male and female). | Xisouthros, family, others, all species of animals. | Atrahasis, wife, family, relations, craftsmen. Grain, possessions, foods. Beasts and creatures of the field. | Utnapishtim and all his family and kin. Craftsmen. Beasts and wild creatures of the field. | |
| Duration of Storm | 40 days and nights | | 7 days and nights | 6 days and nights | 7 days and nights |
| Landing Place | Mountains of Ararat | Mountains of Armenia | (Text missing) | Mt. Nisir (Mt. of Salvation) | |
| Birds Released | Raven, dove, dove, dove | Birds | (Text missing) | Dove, swallow, raven | |
| Sacrifice | Hero offers. "Lord smelled the pleasing odor." | Hero offers | (Text missing) | Hero offers. "Gods smelled the sweet savor." | Hero offers, bows to Utu, Anu, Enlil. |
| Blessing | God blesses Noah and charged him to populate earth. | Hero disappears but his voice instructs others. | | Enlil blesses Utnapishtim. Hero and his wife then become as gods. | Ziusudra granted "life as a god" and "breath eternal"; called "preserver of seed of mankind." |

These non-biblical stories are undoubtedly perversions of the true account that God preserved in Scripture. God may have revealed the true account directly to Moses, or He may have preserved a true oral or written account that Moses used as his source of this information. Moses may have written Genesis under divine inspiration to correct the

Mesopotamian versions (the maximalist view), or both the biblical and Mesopotamian accounts may go back to a common tradition (the minimalist view).

"Biblical religion explained that the seasonal cycle was the consequence of Yahweh's pronouncement and, moreover, evidence of a divine dominion that transcends the elements of the earth. There is no place for Mother-earth in biblical ideology. Earth owes *its* powers (not her powers!) to the divine command."³⁴⁴

2. The Noahic Covenant 9:1-17

Following the Flood God established human life anew on the earth showing His high regard for it. He promised to bless humanity with faithfulness, and He prohibited murder. He also promised with a sign that He would not destroy His creation again with a flood.

"The Noahic covenant's common allusions to 1:1—2:3 show that Noah is the second Adam who heads the new family of humanity, indicating that the blessing continues through the progeny of the Sethite line. Also 8:20—9:17 possesses lexical and thematic connections with the ratification of the Sinai covenant by Moses and the elders (Exod 24:4-18)."³⁴⁵

9:1-7 At this new beginning of the human family, God again commanded Noah and his sons to fill the earth with their descendants (v. 1; cf. 1:28; 9:7).³⁴⁶ As with Adam, He also gave them dominion over the animals and permission to eat food with only one prohibition (cf. 1:26, 28-29; 2:16-17).

God gave Noah permission to eat animals (v. 3). Until now, evidently people had eaten only plants (cf. 1:29). Now humanity received the power of life and death over the animal kingdom.

"God did not expressly prohibit the eating of meat in the initial stipulation at creation, but by inference 9:3's provision for flesh is used as a dividing mark between the antediluvian and postdiluvian periods. Whether or not early man could eat meat by permission from the beginning, now it is stated formally in the Noahic covenant."³⁴⁷

God did, however, prohibit the eating of animal blood to instill respect for the sacredness of life, since blood is a symbol of life (cf. Lev. 3:17; 7:2-27; 19:26; Deut. 12:1-24; 1 Sam. 14:32-34).

³⁴⁴Mathews, p. 397.

³⁴⁵Ibid., p. 398. See also Kenneth Mulzac, "Genesis 9:1-7: Its Theological Connections with the Creation Motif," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12:1 (Spring 2001):65-77.

³⁴⁶See Bernhard W. Anderson, "Creation and Ecology," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 4:1 (January 1983):14-30; Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 155-56.

³⁴⁷Mathews, p. 401.

Until the Mosaic Law, God made no distinction between clean and unclean animals with regard to human consumption. Under the Mosaic Law, the Israelites could not eat certain foods. Under the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), we may again eat any foods (Rom. 14:14; 1 Tim. 4:3). These changes illustrate the fact that God has changed some of the rules for human conduct at various strategic times in history. These changes are significant features that help us identify the various dispensations (economies) by which God has ruled historically.³⁴⁸

God not only reasserted the cultural mandate to reproduce and modified the food law, but He also reasserted the sanctity of human life (cf. ch. 4). The reason for capital punishment (v. 6) is that God made man in His own image. This is one reason, therefore, that murder is so serious. A person extinguishes a revelation of God when he or she murders someone.³⁴⁹ Later the writing prophets announced that God would judge certain foreign nations because they shed human blood without divine authorization (e.g., Amos 1:3, 11, 13; 2:1). God has never countermanded this command. Consequently it is still in force. Before the Flood the lack of capital punishment led to blood vendettas (cf. ch. 4).

"This command laid the foundation for all civil government."³⁵⁰

"The human government and the governors that existed previously—as in the city which Cain established (4:17), or in the case of the mighty men (6:4)—existed solely on human authority. Now, however, divine authority was conferred on human government to exercise oversight over those who lived under its jurisdiction."³⁵¹

"I sometimes feel that often the hue and cry against capital punishment today does not so much rest upon humanitarian interest or even an interest in justice, but rather in a failure to understand that man is unique. The simple fact is that Genesis 9:6 is a sociological statement: The reason that the punishment for murder can be so severe is that man, being

³⁴⁸See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 22-64; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 23-59.

³⁴⁹See Elmer L. Gray, "Capital Punishment in the Ancient Near East," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):65-67; Charles C. Ryrie, "The Doctrine of Capital Punishment," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:515 (July-September 1972):211-17; Marshall Shelley, "The Death Penalty: Two Sides of a Growing Issue," *Christianity Today* (March 2, 1984), pp. 14-17; James A. Stahr, "The Death Penalty," *Interest* (March 1984), pp. 2-3; Duane C. Caylor, "Capital Punishment, a different Christian perspective," *Reformed Journal* 36:7 (July 1986):10-12; Bruce W. Ballard, "The Death Penalty: God's Timeless Standard for the Nations?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:3 (September 2000):471-87; Hamilton, p. 315; and Mathews, pp. 403-6.

³⁵⁰Keil and Delitzsch, 1:153. See Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 157-58.

³⁵¹Pentecost, p. 46.

created in the image of God, has a particular value—not just a theoretical value at some time before the Fall, but such a value yet today."³⁵²

9:8-17 The Noahic Covenant was a suzerainty treaty that God made with humankind through Noah.³⁵³ In it He promised never to destroy all flesh with a flood of water again (v. 11). The sign God appointed to remind people of this promise and to guarantee its veracity was the rainbow (v. 12-15; cf. 6:12). There may have been rainbows before this pronouncement, but now God attached significance to the rainbow.

"Shining upon a dark ground, . . . it represents the victory of the light of love over the fiery darkness of wrath. Originating from the effect of the sun upon a dark cloud, it typifies the willingness of the heavenly to penetrate the earthly. Stretched between heaven and earth, it is as a bond of peace between both, and, spanning the horizon, it points to the all-embracing universality of the Divine mercy."³⁵⁴

"The rainbow arcs like a battle bow hung against the clouds. (The Hebrew word for rainbow, *qeset*, is also the word for a battle bow.) . . .

"The bow is now 'put away,' hung in place by the clouds, suggesting that the 'battle,' the storm, is over. Thus the rainbow speaks of peace."³⁵⁵

This covenant would remain for "all successive generations" (v. 12). People have no responsibility to guarantee the perpetuity of this covenant; God will do all that He promised (v. 9). Observe the recurrence of "I," "Myself," and "My" in these verses. Thus, this covenant is unconditional (v. 9), universal (v. 11), and everlasting (v. 12).³⁵⁶

"What distinguishes the Noahic [Covenant] from the patriarchal one and for that matter all others recounted in the Old Testament is its truly universal perspective. It is God's commitment to the whole of humanity and all terrestrial creation—including the surviving animal population."³⁵⁷

³⁵²Schaeffer, pp. 50-51.

³⁵³See note on 6:18.

³⁵⁴Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, 1:289-90.

³⁵⁵Ross, "Genesis," p. 40.

³⁵⁶See Thomas, pp. 89-93.

³⁵⁷Mathews, p. 62.

"The covenant with Noah [6:18; 9:9-16] is entirely unconditional rather than a conditional covenant, as in the Edenic situation. The certainty of the fulfillment of the covenant with Noah rested entirely with God and not with Noah. As this point is somewhat obscured in current discussion on the covenants of Scripture, it is important to distinguish covenants that are conditional from those that are unconditional. Conditional covenants depend on the recipients meeting the conditions imposed by God. Unconditional covenants declare that God's purpose will be fulfilled regardless of an individual's response. The fact that the covenant is one-sided—from God to humankind—does not mean that there is no response on the part of humankind. But the point is that the response is anticipated and does not leave the fulfillment of the covenant in doubt."³⁵⁸

The elements of the Noahic Covenant are the following. God held man responsible for protecting the sanctity of human life by orderly governmental rule even to the use of capital punishment (9:5-6; cf. Rom. 13:1-7). God promised not to judge humanity again with a universal flood (8:21; 9:11-16), and He confirmed the established order of nature (8:22; 9:2). God now permitted people to eat animal flesh, evidently for the first time (9:3-4). God announced that Canaan's descendants would be servants to their brethren (9:25-26), Shem's descendants would enjoy a special relationship to the Lord (9:26-27), and Japheth's descendants would become enlarged races (9:27).

". . . the author is intentionally drawing out the similarities between God's covenant with Noah and the covenant at Sinai. Why? The answer that best fits with the author's purposes is that he wants to show that God's covenant at Sinai is not a new act of God. The covenant is rather a return to God's original promises. Once again at Sinai, as he had done in the past, God is at work restoring his fellowship with man and bringing man back to himself. The covenant with Noah plays an important role in the author's development of God's restoration of blessing. It lies midway between God's original blessing of all mankind (1:28) and God's promise to bless 'all peoples on the earth' through Abraham (12:1-3)."³⁵⁹

3. The curse on Canaan 9:18-29

This pericope presents the characteristics of the three branches of the human family that grew out of Noah. Moses stressed the themes of blessing and cursing. God cursed Canaan with slavery because Ham showed disrespect toward Noah whereas He blessed Shem and Japheth for their regard for their father's vulnerable condition.

³⁵⁸Walvoord, pp. 188-89.

³⁵⁹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 93.

"The world seems all set for a new start. The slate has been wiped clean, and we hope that the mistakes of the antediluvians will not be repeated. But no sooner is the blessing pronounced and the eternal covenant confirmed than man lapses again."³⁶⁰

9:18-24 Evidently Noah became so drunk that he took off all his clothes and then passed out naked in his tent. There is no indication that Ham disrobed his father or committed some homosexual act.³⁶¹ Noah's shame was not that he drank wine but that he drank to excess and thereby lost self-control that resulted in immodesty (cf. Eph. 5:18). Certainly this incident should warn the reader of the potential harm of drunkenness both for the drinker and for his or her family. The stumbling block for Adam and Eve had also been food.

"Whatever the actual nature of his [Noah's] conduct might have been [in becoming drunk and uncovering himself in his tent] . . . , the author presents his deed as one of disgrace and shame ('nakedness,' as in Ge 3), and he seems intent on depicting the scene in such a way as to establish parallels between Noah's disgrace (he took of the fruit of his orchard and became naked) and that of Adam and Eve (who took of the fruit of the Garden and saw that they were naked)."³⁶²

Ham's gazing on Noah's nakedness represents an early step in the abandonment of the moral code after the Flood. Ham dishonored Noah not by seeing him naked but by his outspoken delight in his father's condition (cf. Gen. 19:26; Exod. 33:20; Judg. 13:22; 1 Sam. 6:19).

"It is difficult for someone living in the modern world to understand the modesty and discretion of privacy called for in ancient morality. Nakedness in the OT was from the beginning a thing of shame for fallen man [3:7] . . . the state of nakedness was both undignified and vulnerable. . . . To see someone uncovered was to bring dishonor and to gain advantage for potential exploitation."³⁶³

"The sons of Noah are here shown to belong to two groups of humankind, those who like Adam and Eve hide the shame of their nakedness and those who like Ham, or rather the Canaanites, have no sense of their shame before God.

³⁶⁰Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 206.

³⁶¹See Mathews, pp. 417, 419.

³⁶²Sailhaver, *The Pentateuch* . . . , p. 120. See also Mathews, p. 418.

³⁶³Allen P. Ross, "The Curse of Canaan," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:547 (July-September 1980):230.

The one group, the line of Shem, will be blessed (9:26); but the other, the Canaanites (not the Hamites), can only be cursed (9:25)."³⁶⁴

"Shem, the father of Abraham, is the paradigm of later Israel; and Ham of their archenemies, Egypt and Canaan (10:6). Lying behind this is the ancient concept of corporate personality. Because of this unity of father-son, the character of the father is anticipated in the deeds of the sons. Hebrew theology recognized that due to parental influence future generations usually committed the same acts as their fathers whether for ill or good. In this case the curse is directed at Ham's son as Ham's just deserts for the disrespect he had toward his own father, Noah."³⁶⁵

Ham's action also may have involved an attempt to take leadership of the family from Noah.³⁶⁶ Shem and Japheth's act of covering their father's nakedness, however, imitated God who covered Adam and Eve's nakedness in the garden (3:21).

9:25-27

This oracle, the first time Moses recorded a person uttering a curse, is a prophecy announcing divine judgment on Canaan's descendants for *their* sin that had its seed in Ham's act. Noah as a prophet announced the future of this grandson's descendants (cf. Gen. 49; Deut. 33; et al.).

"For his breach of the family, his [Ham's] own family would falter."³⁶⁷

The Canaanites became known for their shameless depravity in sexual matters.³⁶⁸ When Joshua invaded their land he proved to be God's instrument of punishment for the Canaanites. Nevertheless the Canaanites survived until the Romans destroyed their final colony at Carthage in North Africa in 146 B.C.

There is no basis for the popular notion that this oracle doomed the Hamites, who were mainly Africans, to a position of inferiority or slavery among the other peoples of the world. Canaan and his branch of the family are the subject of this prophecy, not Ham and all his descendants.

"There are no grounds in our passage for an ethnic reading of the 'curse' as some have done, supposing that some

³⁶⁴Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 130.

³⁶⁵Mathews, p. 421.

³⁶⁶See Jordan, pp. 47-52.

³⁶⁷Kidner, p. 104.

³⁶⁸See Charles Pfeiffer, *Ras Shamra and the Bible*.

peoples are inferior to others. Here Genesis looks only to the social and religious life of Israel's ancient rival Canaan, whose immorality defiled their land and threatened Israel's religious fidelity (cf. Lev 18:28; Josh 23). It was not an issue of ethnicity but of the wicked practices that characterized Canaanite culture."³⁶⁹

The general lesson of the passage is that God blesses those who behave righteously but curses those who abandon moral restraint.

"Instructively, the first three heroes of faith listed in Hebrews are from Genesis 4—6: Abel, Enoch, and Noah. All believed God, but their destinies were significantly different. Abel believed God and died. Enoch believed God and did not die. Noah believed God, and everyone else died in the Flood; eventually he died a natural death at the good old age of 950 years. We cannot dictate where faith will lead. The human tendency is to see only Enoch as the example of faith, but Abel is also given as our example. What all three have in common is that they walked by faith and pleased God. That faith is an example to us."³⁷⁰

E. WHAT BECAME OF NOAH'S SONS 10:1—11:9

This section gives in some detail the distribution of Noah's descendants over the earth after the Flood (cf. 9:18-19).

This fourth *toledot* section (10:1—11:9) brings the inspired record of primeval events to a climax and provides a transition to the patriarchal narratives. All the nations of the world in their various lands with their different languages descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Of special interest to the original Israelite readers were the Canaanites and the other ancient Near Eastern powers.

"From this section we learn that the 'blessing' is for all peoples because all nations have their source in the one man, Noah, whom God favored. Moreover, the disunity among Noah's offspring that resulted from the tower event [11:1-9] did not prevent the blessing God had envisioned for humanity."³⁷¹

"The Tower of Babel incident (11:1-9), though following the table in the present literary arrangement, actually precedes chronologically the dispersal of the nations. This interspersal of narrative (11:1-9) separates

³⁶⁹Mathews, p. 423. See also Charles C. Ryrie, *You Mean the Bible Teaches That . . .*, p. 60; Thomas Figart, *A Biblical Perspective on the Race Problem*, p. 55; and O. Palmer Robertson, "Current Critical Questions Concerning the 'Curse of Ham' (Gen 9:20-27)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:2 (June 1998):177-88.

³⁷⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 155.

³⁷¹Mathews, p. 427.

the two genealogies of Shem (10:21-31; 11:10-26), paving the way for the particular linkage between the Terah (Abraham) clan and the Shemite lineage (11:27). The story of the tower also looks ahead by anticipating the role that Abram (12:1-3) will play in restoring the blessing to the dispersed nations."³⁷²

1. The table of nations ch. 10

This table shows that Yahweh created all peoples (cf. Deut. 32:8; Amos 9:7; Acts 17:26). As the genealogy in chapter 5, this one traces 10 main individuals, and the last one named had three sons.

This chapter contains one of the oldest, if not the oldest, ethnological table in the literature of the ancient world. It reveals a remarkable understanding of the ethnic and linguistic situation following the Flood. Almost all the names in this chapter have been found in archaeological discoveries in the last century and a half. Many of them appear in subsequent books of the Old Testament.

". . . the names in chapter 10 are presented in a dissimilar manner: the context may be that of an individual (e.g., Nimrod), a city (e.g., Asshur), a people (e.g., Jebusites) or a nation (e.g., Elam).

"A failure to appreciate this mixed arrangement of Genesis 10 has led, we believe, to numerous unwarranted conclusions. For example, it should not be assumed that all the descendants of any one of Noah's sons lived in the same locality, spoke the same language, or even belonged to a particular race."³⁷³

"The table of nations is a 'horizontal' genealogy rather than a 'vertical' one (those in chaps. 5 and 11 are vertical). Its purpose is not primarily to trace ancestry; instead it shows political, geographical, and ethnic affiliations among tribes for various reasons, most notable being holy war. Tribes shown to be 'kin' would be in league together. Thus this table aligns the predominant tribes in and around the land promised to Israel. These names include founders of tribes, clans, cities, and territories."³⁷⁴

In contrast to the genealogy in chapter 5, this one lists no ages. It contains place and group names, which are spoken of as the ancestors of other places or groups, as well as the names of individuals. God built nations from families. Thus it is quite clearly a selective list, not comprehensive. The writer's selection of material shows that he had particular interest in presenting Israel's neighbors. Israel would deal with, displace, or subjugate many of these peoples, as well as the Canaanites (ch. 9). They all had a

³⁷²Ibid., p. 428.

³⁷³Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, p. 76. See pages 76-79 for discussion of each name in chapter 10.

³⁷⁴Ross, "Genesis," p. 42.

common origin. Evidently 70 nations descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth: 26 from Shem, 30 from Ham, and 14 from Japheth (cf. Deut. 32:8). Seventy became a traditional round number for a large group of descendants.³⁷⁵ Jacob's family also comprised 70 people (46:27), which may indicate that Moses viewed Israel as a microcosm of humanity as he presented it here. God set the microcosm apart to bless the macrocosm.

Japheth's descendants (vv. 2-5) settled north, east, and west of Ararat.³⁷⁶ Their distance from Israel probably explains the brief treatment that they received in this list compared with that of the Hamites and Shemites. The "coastlands" (v. 5) are the inland areas and the northern Mediterranean coastlands on the European shore from Turkey to Spain. The dispersion of the nations "according to . . . language" (v. 5) took place after Babel (ch. 11) all along these coasts as well as elsewhere.³⁷⁷

Ham's family (vv. 6-20) moved east, south, and southwest into Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Africa. Canaan's descendants (vv. 15-21) did not migrate as far south but settled in Palestine.³⁷⁸ The length of these Hamite Canaanite lists indicates the importance of these people and places in Israel's later history.

It is possible that Sargon of Agade, whom many secular historians regard as the first ruler of Babylon, may be the Nimrod (meaning "We shall rebel") of verses 8-10.³⁷⁹ Many people in ancient times had more than one name. Reference to him probably foreshadows 11:1-9.

"The influx of the Amorites in Canaan is disputed. It does not necessarily follow that the original Amorites, attributed to Hamite descent in Genesis 10, were a Semitic people since the term 'Amorite' in ancient Near Eastern documents does not serve as a definitive source for designating ethnicity. Moreover, linguistic evidence does not always assure true ethnic derivation."³⁸⁰

Shem's posterity (vv. 21-31) settled to the northeast and southeast of the Canaanites. This branch of the human family is also important in the Genesis record of Israel's history.

"When the two lines of Shem are compared (10:21-31; 11:10-26), there is a striking divergence at the point of Eber's descendants, Peleg and Joktan

³⁷⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 213.

³⁷⁶For helpful diagrams showing the generational relationships of the descendants of Japheth, Ham, and Shem respectively, see Mathews, pp. 440, 444, and 459.

³⁷⁷For discussion of the identities of each name, see Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 216-32; or the NET Bible notes on these verses.

³⁷⁸For explanation of the locations the individuals, cities, tribes, and nations cited in this table, see Allen P. Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis 10—Its Content," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:549 (January-March 1981):23-31. Note the absence of the common sevens in the structuring in Canaan's genealogy suggesting chaos (Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 164-65).

³⁷⁹Oliver R. Blosser, "Was Nimrod-Sargon of Agade, the First King of Babylon?" *It's About Time* (June 1987), pp. 10-13.

³⁸⁰Mathews, p. 456. See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Amorites," by A. R. Millard.

[v. 25]. In chap. 10 Peleg is dropped altogether after his mention, while the nonelect line of Joktan is detailed. It is left to the second lineage in chap. 11 to trace out Peleg's role as ancestral father of Abraham . . ."381

"This Table of Nations, then, traces affiliation of tribes to show relationships, based on some original physical connections.

"It is clear that the writer is emphasizing the development of these nations that were of primary importance to Israel (*yalad* sections) within the overall structure of the Table (*b'ne* arrangement)."382

"The three geographical arcs of the branches intersect at the center—that is, Canaan, Israel's future homeland."383

The section reveals that it was God's plan to bless the human race by dividing the family of man by languages, locations, and leaders.³⁸⁴ Remember that God formerly blessed the earth by dividing the light from the darkness, the earth from the heavens, and the land from the seas (ch. 1).

"By correlating the number of nations [in ch. 10, i.e., 70] with the number of the seed of Abraham [in 46:27], he [the writer] holds Abraham's 'seed' before the reader as a new humanity and Abraham himself as a kind of second Adam, the 'father of many nations' (Ge 17:5)."385

". . . his intention is not to give an exhaustive list but rather a representative list, one which, for him, is obtained in the number seven."386

"The table's figure of 'seventy' for the world's nations is alluded to by Jesus in the sending forth of the seventy disciples, as recounted by Luke (10:1-16). Here the evangelist emphasizes the mission of the church in its worldwide evangelistic endeavors."387

³⁸¹Mathews, p. 459.

³⁸²Allen P. Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis 10—Its Structure," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:548 (October-December 1980):350. See also Eugene H. Merrill, "The Peoples of the Old Testament according to Genesis 10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:613 (January-March 1997):3-22.

³⁸³Mathews, p. 433. See Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, map 15.

³⁸⁴Some creationists believe that the division of the earth in Peleg's day (v. 25) refers to continental drift, but most creationists do not take this view. For a creationist discussion of the subject of continental drift, see Ham, et al., pp. 11-12, 41-63; or David M. Fouts, "Peleg in Gen 10:25," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:1 (March 1998):17-21.

³⁸⁵Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 131.

³⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁸⁷Mathews, p. 437. See also Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part II. From Noah to Abraham*, pp. 175-80.

2. The dispersion at Babel 11:1-9

This pericope is a flashback that explains the division of the earth in Peleg's time (10:25). The main emphasis in this section is not the building of the tower of Babel but the dispersion of the peoples. We can see this in the literary structure of the passage.³⁸⁸

- A All the earth had one language (v. 1)
- B there (v. 2)
- C one to another (v. 3)
- D Come, let's make bricks (v. 3)
- E Let's make for ourselves (v. 4)
- F a city and a tower
- G And the Lord came down to see (v. 5; cf. 8:1)
- F' the city and the tower (v. 5)
- E' that the humans built (v. 5)
- D' Come, let's confuse (v. 7)
- C' everyone the language of his neighbor (v. 7)
- B' from there (v. 8)
- A' (confused) the language of the whole earth (v. 9)

When people attempted to preserve their unity and make a name for themselves by building a tower, Yahweh frustrated the plan and scattered everyone by confusing the language that bound them together.

"The tower of Babel story is the last great judgment that befell mankind in primeval times. Its place and function in Gen 1—11 may be compared to the fall in Gen 3 and the sons of God episode in Gen 6:1-4, both of which triggered divine judgments of great and enduring consequence."³⁸⁹

This story explains to God's people how God scattered the nations and why. In judgment for trying to establish a world state in opposition to divine rule (human government run amuck), God struck the thing that bound people together, namely, a common language. Chronologically the Babel incident preceded the dispersal that Moses described with genealogies in chapter 10.³⁹⁰

"By placing the Tower of Babel incident just prior to the patriarchal stories, the biblical writer is suggesting, in the first place, that post-Flood humanity is as iniquitous as pre-Flood humanity. Rather than sending

³⁸⁸Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 235. Cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, p. 22; Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 234-38; Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 176-77.

³⁸⁹Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 242.

³⁹⁰Paul T. Penley, "A Historical Reading of Genesis 11:1-9: The Sumerian Demise and Dispersion under the Ur III Dynasty," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:4 (December 2007):693-714, argued for the identification of the tower of Babel incident with the demise and dispersion of the last great Sumerian dynasty centered at Ur.

something as devastating as a flood to annihilate mankind, however, God now places his hope in a covenant with Abraham as a powerful solution to humanity's sinfulness. Thus problem (ch. 11) and solution (ch. 12) are brought into immediate juxtaposition, and the forcefulness of this structural move would have been lost had ch. 10 intervened between the two."³⁹¹

"As it is presently situated in the text, the account of the founding of Babylon falls at the end of the list of fourteen names from the line of Joktan (10:26-29). At the end of the list of the ten names of Peleg's line, however, is the account of the call of Abraham (11:27—12:10). So two great lines of the descendants of Shem divide in the two sons of Eber (10:25). One ends in Babylon, the other in the Promised Land."³⁹²

11:1-2 Some of the Hamites migrated "east" (specifically southeast) to the plain of Shinar (cf. 10:10). This was in the Mesopotamian basin (modern Iraq).

"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)."³⁹³

"Following the Ararat departure, the people migrated southeast to the lower Euphrates valley. Genesis 1—11 then has come full circle from 'Eden' to 'Babel,' both remembered for the expulsion of their residents."³⁹⁴

11:3-4 The motivation for building a city was to make the builders a name (cf. Ps. 14:1).³⁹⁵ The object of this endeavor was to establish a center by which they might maintain their unity.

"A defensive wall is the hallmark of a city (see 4:17). Cities in the ancient Near East were not designed to be lived in but were intended for religious and public purposes."³⁹⁶

³⁹¹Hamilton, pp. 347-48. See J. Sasson, "The 'Tower of Babel' As a Clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History [Gen 1—11:9]," in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*, pp. 218-19.

³⁹²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 134.

³⁹³Idem, "Genesis," p. 104.

³⁹⁴Mathews, p. 467.

³⁹⁵Later God would "make a name" for Abram (12:2-3).

³⁹⁶Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 179.

God desired unity for humankind, but one that He created, not one founded on a social state.³⁹⁷ They wanted to "empower" themselves. Both motive and object were ungodly. God had instructed man to fill the earth (1:28), to spread over the whole planet.

The builders of the "tower" seem to have intended that it serve as a memorial or landmark among other things. It was probably a ziggurat used for religious purposes.

"Mesopotamian religion claimed that their cities were of divine parentage. A symbol of this obsession with divinity among the Mesopotamians was the ziggurat (Akk. *zīqurratu*) that was erected as early as the third millennium B.C. The ziggurat was a step-ladder edifice, made up of mud bricks, whose bottom was square or rectangular. The precise meaning of the structure is unknown, though it is widely agreed that it formed a stairway between the gods and earth (cf. Gen 28:12). At the foot of the ziggurat as well as the pinnacle was a temple area serving as a habitation for the god. Ziggurats may have been considered an earthly imitation of the heavenly residence of the gods."³⁹⁸

11:5-6 The builders undoubtedly expected to ascend to heaven to meet God. Instead God descended to earth to meet them. Had God allowed this project to continue the results would have been even worse and more serious than they were at this time. The sin of the builders was their refusal to obey God-given directives.

"Depraved humanity are united in their spiritual endeavor to find, through technology, existential meaning apart from God and the means to transgress its boundaries. Unless God intervenes and divides them by confounding their speech, nothing can stop human beings in their overweening pride and their desire for autonomy."³⁹⁹

The construction of cities by itself is not sinful, of course. God chose Jerusalem for His people, and He will create the New Jerusalem for believers to inhabit. It is the pride and security that people place in their cities that God disapproves.

11:7 God's soliloquy in this verse mimics the language of the tower builders in verses 3 and 4 (cf. 1:26). The tower was so puny that He had to come

³⁹⁷Mathews, p. 473.

³⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 470-71. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 179.

³⁹⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 182.

down to see it (cf. Isa. 40:22). The confusion of language probably involved more than just the introduction of new words.

"If language is the audible expression of emotions, conceptions, and thoughts of the mind, the cause of the confusion or division of the one human language into different national dialects might be sought in an effect produced upon the human mind, by which the original unity of emotion, conception, thought, and will was broken up. This inward unity had no doubt been already disturbed by sin, but the disturbance had not yet amounted to a perfect breach."⁴⁰⁰

Some scholars believe that this judgment also involved the implantation of ethnic and racial distinctions in humankind. The Table of Nations in chapter 10 may imply this.⁴⁰¹

11:8 The resultant confusion led to a scattering of the people over the "whole earth" (cf. v. 9). God did not allow human rebellion to reach the level that it did before the Flood. God forced people to do what they refused to do voluntarily, namely, scatter over the face of the earth.

Some interpreters take the confusion of languages to have been a local phenomenon only.⁴⁰² Most, however, regard it as the source of the major language groups in the world today.

11:9 "Babel" means "confusion" in Hebrew, and "the gate of gods" in Babylonian.

". . . Gen 11:1-9, the tower of Babel story, is a satire on the claims of Babylon to be the center of civilization and its temple tower the gate of heaven (E[numa]E[lish] 6:50-80): Babel does not mean gate of God, but 'confusion' and 'folly.' Far from its temple's top reaching up to heaven, it is so low that God has to descend from heaven just to see it! (11:4-9)."⁴⁰³

This was the original Babylon that forever after was the city most consistently rebellious against God's government in human history. It

⁴⁰⁰Keil and Delitzsch, 1:174-75.

⁴⁰¹See Merrill, "The Peoples . . .," p. 22.

⁴⁰²See James E. Strickling, "The Tower of Babel and the Confusion of Tongues," *Kronos* (Fall 1982), pp. 53-62. Strickling believed lightning struck the tower of Babel and that the confusion of speech that followed resulted from a scrambling of the electrical circuits in the brains of those struck. This is an interesting idea but impossible to prove.

⁴⁰³Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. xlviiii-xlix.

stands as a symbol of organized rebellion against God elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Rev. 17 and 18).⁴⁰⁴

"Man certainly did not expect his project to take such a turn. He did not anticipate that the name he wanted to make for himself would refer to a place of noncommunication."⁴⁰⁵

The story of Babel is important for several reasons.

1. It explains the beginning of and reason for the various languages of mankind.
2. It probably explains the origin of the "races" within humankind.

"The separate language groups no longer could inter-marry freely with the rest of mankind. As in-breeding and lack of access to the larger pool of genes occurred, ethnic characteristics developed. Furthermore, each local environment tended to favor selection of certain traits, and eliminate the others. Ethnic characteristics, such as skin color, arose from loss of genetic variability, not from origin of new genes through mutation as suggested by evolution.

"The concept of race is an evolutionary idea . . . (Acts 17:26). All humans possess the same color, just different amounts of it. We all descended from Noah and Adam."⁴⁰⁶

"The Bible doesn't tell us what skin color our first parents had, but, from a design point of view, the 'middle [color]' makes a great beginning. Starting with medium-skinned parents (**Aa_Bb**), it would take only one generation to produce all the variation we see in human skin color today. In fact, this is the normal situation in India today. Some Indians are as dark as the darkest Africans, and some—perhaps a brother or sister in the same family—as light as the lightest Europeans. I once knew a family from India that included members with every major skin color you could see anywhere in the world.

"But now notice what happens if human groups were isolated after creation. If those with very dark skins (**AABB**) migrate into the same areas and/or marry only those with very dark skins, then all their children will have very dark skins. (**AABB** is the only

⁴⁰⁴See Everett H. Peterson, "Prehistory and the Tower of Babel," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 19:2 (September 1982):87-90.

⁴⁰⁵J. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, p. 18.

⁴⁰⁶A plaque explaining an exhibit at the Institute for Creation Research Museum, Santee, Cal., which I observed on May 21, 1997.

possible combination of **AB** egg and sperms cells, which are the only types that can be produced by **AABB** parents.) Similarly, parents with very light skins (**aabb**) can have only very light-skinned children, since they don't have any **A** or **B** genes to pass on. Even certain medium-skinned parents (**AAbb** or **aaBB**) can get 'locked-in' to having only medium-skinned children, like the Orientals, Polynesians, and some of my ancestors, the Native Americans.

"Where people with different skin colors get together again (as they do in the West Indies, for example), you find the full range of variation again—nothing less, but nothing more either, than what we started with. Clearly, all this is *variation within kind*. . . .

"What happened as the descendants of medium-skinned parents produced a variety of descendants? Evolution? Not at all. Except for albinism (the mutational loss of skin color), the human gene pool is no bigger and no different now than the gene pool present at creation. As people multiplied, the genetic variability *built right into* the first created human beings came to visible expression. The darkest Nigerian and the lightest Norwegian, the tallest Watusi and the shortest Pygmy, the highest soprano and the lowest bass could have been present right from the beginning in two quite average-looking people. Great variation in size, color, form, function, etc., would also be present in the two created ancestors of all the other kinds (plants and animals) as well.

"Evolutionists *assume* that all life started from one or a few chemically evolved life forms with an extremely small gene pool. For evolutionists, enlargement of the gene pool by selection of random mutations is a slow, tedious process that burdens each type with a 'genetic load' of harmful mutations and evolutionary leftovers. Creationists *assume* each created kind began with a large gene pool, designed to multiply and fill the earth with all its tremendous ecologic and geographic variety. (See Genesis, chapter 1.)"⁴⁰⁷

"Many thinkers labor under the illusion that evolution is an empirical science when in fact it is a philosophy."⁴⁰⁸

3. It demonstrates the inclination of fallen man to rebel against God and to try to provide for his needs in his own way rather than by trusting and obeying God.

⁴⁰⁷G. Parker, pp. 111, 113-14. See also Ham, et al., pp. 15-16, 131-55. See *ibid.*, pp. 19, 197-207, for discussion of how animals could have reached remote parts of the earth.

⁴⁰⁸Norman L. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:1 (March 1999):7.

4. It illustrates that rebellion against God results in (a) broken fellowship with God and man, and (b) failure to realize God's intention for man in his creation, namely, that he rule the earth effectively.
5. It provides the historical background for what follows in Genesis. Abraham came from this area.

"Irony is seen in the beginning and the ending of this passage. The group at Babel began as the whole earth (11:1), but now they were spread over the whole earth (11:9). By this time the lesson is clarified: God's purpose will be accomplished in spite of the arrogance and defiance of man's own purposes. He brings down the proud, but exalts the faithful.

"The significance of this little story is great. It explains to God's people how the nations were scattered abroad. Yet the import goes much deeper. The fact that it was Babylon, the beginning of kingdoms under Nimrod from Cush, adds a rather ominous warning: Great nations cannot defy God and long survive. The new nation of Israel need only survey the many nations around her to perceive that God disperses and curses the rebellious, bringing utter confusion and antagonism among them. If Israel would obey and submit to God's will, then she would be the source of blessing to the world.

"Unfortunately, Israel also raised her head in pride and refused to obey the Lord God. Thus she too was scattered across the face of the earth."⁴⁰⁹

F. WHAT BECAME OF SHEM 11:10-26

"The Babel account (11:1-9) is not the end of early Genesis. If it were, the story would conclude on the sad note of human failure. But as with earlier events in Genesis 1—11, God's grace once again supersedes human sin, insuring the continued possibilities of the promissory blessings (1:28; 9:1). . . . The scaffolding of human pride would be dismantled by the erection of the Shemite line that culminates in obedient Abraham, who likewise is found in the region of Shinar. Abraham would prove to be the nations' deliverance."⁴¹⁰

"Without the blessing of God the situation of humanity is without hope: that seems to be the chief thrust of the opening chapters of Genesis."⁴¹¹

In contrast to the genealogy in chapter 5, this one emphasizes life and expansion rather than death, even though longevity was declining.⁴¹² It starts with Noah's son Shem whom

⁴⁰⁹Allen P. Ross, "The Dispersion of the Nations in Genesis 11:1-9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:550 (April-June 1981):133. See also Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 103-4.

⁴¹⁰Mathews, p. 487.

⁴¹¹Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. li.

⁴¹²For short histories of the prepatristal period of ancient Near Eastern history, see John Bright, *A History of Israel*, pp. 17-37; or Siegfried Schwantes, *A Short History of the Ancient Near East*.

God blessed, and it concludes with Abram whom God purposed to bless. This is the line of Israel's ancestors. It is a vertical list of the type used in the ancient Near East to document legitimate claims to thrones or inheritances.⁴¹³ This genealogy, as the one in chapter 5, appears to be complete. The purpose of the genealogy is to connect Abram to Noah and to give background information essential for understanding the story of Abram that follows.⁴¹⁴

" . . . the author's aim is to show that God's promise concerning the seed of the woman cannot be thwarted by the confusion and scattering of the nations at Babylon."⁴¹⁵

"If the message of Genesis is essentially one of redemption, Gen 3—11 explains why man needs salvation and what he needs to be saved from. Chaps. 1—2, in describing the original state of the world, also describe the goal of redemption, to which ultimately the world and humanity will return when the patriarchal promises are completely fulfilled."⁴¹⁶

"An extensive statistical analysis of the life-spans of the patriarchs, as given in Genesis Chapter 5 and 11, shows that statistically the life-span can be considered constant before the Flood, while after the Flood the data can be fitted by a asymptotic exponential decay curve. Also, it is concluded that as for the life-spans reported in Genesis Chapter 11, the data in the Masoretic text are the authentic ones; those in the Septuagint have been tampered with. Moreover, it is statistically unlikely that there are gaps in the genealogies in Genesis Chapter 11."⁴¹⁷

Most scholars regard "Eber" (v. 14) as the individual from whom the Jews received the name "Hebrew." Adam, Noah, and Abram all fathered three named sons linking them as saviors of humanity. In Abram's case these sons (descendants) were Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

The genealogy of Shem (11:10-26) in this pericope prefaces the story of Abram (11:27—25:11). This structure serves as a prototype for the narrative that follows in Genesis. Similarly the genealogy of Ishmael (25:12-18) introduces the story of Jacob and Esau (25:19—35:29), and the genealogy of Esau (36:1-43) introduces the story of Joseph (37:2—50:26).

⁴¹³Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 249.

⁴¹⁴Mathews, p. 488, included a helpful chart of the 20 generations from Adam to Abram.

⁴¹⁵Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 136.

⁴¹⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. lii.

⁴¹⁷William L. Seaver, "A Statistical Analysis of the Genesis Life-Spans," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 20:2 (September 1983):80. The genealogies in Genesis 11:10-26 and 1 Chronicles 1:17-27 are identical, but the one in Luke 3:34-36 inserts the name Cainan between Arpachshad and Shelah. The inclusion of Cainan may indicate that Luke used the Septuagint to compose his genealogy since this name appears in this translation but not in the Hebrew Bible genealogies. Cainan appears elsewhere in Luke's list as Adam's great-grandson (Luke 3:37-38), so this may be a scribal error. See M. S. Mills, "A Comparison of the Genesis and Lukan Genealogies (The Case for Cainan)" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978).

"With 11:26 the scene has finally been set for the patriarchal history to unfold. The opening chapters of Genesis have provided us the fundamental insights for interpreting these chapters properly. Gen 1 revealed the character of God and the nature of the world man finds himself in. Gen 2 and 3 portrayed the relationship between man and woman, and the effects man's disobedience has had on man-woman and divine-human relations. Chap. 5 sketched the long years that passed before the crisis of the great flood (chaps. 6—9), which almost destroyed all humanity for its sinfulness. The table of the nations (chap. 10) started the process of Israel's geographical and political self-definition with respect to the other nations in the world, but Gen 11:1-9 reminded us that the nations were in confusion and that mankind's proudest achievements were but folly in God's sight and under his judgment.

"However, according to 11:10-26, just five generations after Peleg, whose lifetime according to 10:25 saw the confusion of languages at Babel, Abram arrives. As 12:3 will declare, it is through him that all the families of the earth will be blessed. Man is not without hope. The brevity of this genealogy is a reminder that God's grace constantly exceeds his wrath. He may punish to the third or fourth generation but he shows mercy to thousands (Deut 5:9; 7:9)."⁴¹⁸

The chronological framework for the patriarchal stories (Abraham through Joseph) rests on two important texts.

1. **1 Kings 6:1** states that the Exodus took place 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon's reign (i.e., 967 B.C.). This makes the date of the Exodus close to 1446 B.C.
2. **Exodus 12:40** records that "the sons of Israel lived in Egypt" 430 years before the Exodus, or about 1876 B.C. This is the probable date when Jacob's family moved to Egypt (ch. 46).

From these two texts we can calculate other dates in the patriarchal period.⁴¹⁹

"It is . . . not because scholars of to-day begin with more conservative presuppositions than their predecessors that they have a much greater respect for the patriarchal stories than was formerly common, but because the evidence warrants it."⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 253-54.

⁴¹⁹For a helpful survey of the recent history of scholarly opinion regarding the historical reliability of the patriarchal narratives, see Kenneth L. Barker, "The Antiquity and Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, pp. 131-39; Emil C. Wcela, "The Abraham Stories, History and Faith," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 10 (October 1970):176-81; and Nahum M. Sarna, "Abraham in History," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 3 (December 1977):5-9.

⁴²⁰H. H. Rowley, "Recent Discovery and the Patriarchal Age," in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, p. 318.

"It is beyond question that traditional and conservative views of biblical history, especially of the patriarchal period, will continue to be favored by whatever results accrue from ongoing Ebla research."⁴²¹

| PATRIARCHAL CHRONOLOGICAL DATA ⁴²² | | |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| 2296 | Birth of Terah | Gen. 11:24 |
| 2166 | Birth of Abram | Gen. 11:27 |
| 2091 | Abram's departure from Haran | Gen. 12:4 |
| 2081 | Abram's marriage to Hagar | Gen. 16:3 |
| 2080 | Birth of Ishmael | Gen. 16:16 |
| 2067 | Reaffirmation of covenant | Gen. 17:1 |
| 2067-66 | Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah | Gen. 19:24 |
| 2066 | Birth of Isaac | Gen. 21:2-3; cf. 21:5 |
| 2029 | Death of Sarah | Gen. 23:2 |
| 2026 | Marriage of Isaac | Gen. 25:20 |
| 2006 | Birth of Jacob and Esau | Gen. 25:26 |
| 1991 | Death of Abram | Gen. 25:7 |
| 1966 | Marriage of Esau | Gen. 26:34 |
| 1943 | Death of Ishmael | Gen. 25:17 |
| 1930 | Jacob's journey to Haran | Gen. 28:2 |
| 1923 | Jacob's marriages | Gen. 29:23, 28; 30:4, 9 |
| 1918 | Birth of Judah | Gen. 29:35 |
| 1916 | End of Jacob's 14 year labor for his wives | Gen. 29:30 |
| 1916 | Birth of Joseph | Gen. 30:23 |
| 1910 | End of Jacob's stay with Laban | Gen. 31:41 |
| 1910 | Jacob's arrival at Shechem | Gen. 33:18 |
| 1902 | Rape of Dinah | Gen. 34:1-2 |
| 1900 | Marriage of Judah | Gen. 38:1-2 |
| 1899 | Selling of Joseph | Gen. 37:2, 28 |
| 1888 | Joseph imprisoned | Gen. 39:20; cf. 41:1 |
| 1886 | Joseph released | Gen. 41:1, 46 |
| 1886 | Death of Isaac | Gen. 35:28 |

⁴²¹Eugene H. Merrill, "Ebla and Biblical Historical Inerrancy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:550 (October-December 1983):318. See also Giovanni Pettinato, "The Royal Archives of Tell Mardikh-Ebla," *Biblical Archaeologist* 39 (May 1976):44-52.

⁴²²From Eugene H. Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:547 (July-September 1980):248.

| | | |
|------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1879 | Beginning of famine | Gen. 41:54 |
| 1878 | Brothers' first visit to Egypt | Gen. 42:1-3 |
| 1877 | Judah's incest with Tamar | Gen. 38:18 |
| 1877 | Brothers' second visit to Egypt | Gen. 43:1, 15; 45:6, 11 |
| 1876 | Jacob's descent to Egypt | Gen. 46:6; cf. 47:9 |
| 1859 | Death of Jacob | Gen. 47:28 |
| 1806 | Death of Joseph | Gen. 50:22 |

II. PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVES 11:27—50:26

One of the significant changes in the emphasis that occurs at this point in Genesis is from cursing in the primeval record to blessing in the patriarchal narratives. The Abrahamic Covenant is most important in this respect. How Abram's family gained these blessings unfolds. Israel could, and we can, identify with their experiences.

"Chapters 1—11 are set in Babylonia; chs. 12—36 are set in Palestine; chs. 37—50 are set in Egypt. (The same kind of tripartite geographical focus emerges from Exodus: [1] 1:1—12:36, in Egypt; [2] 12:37—18:27, to Sinai; [3] 19:1—40:38, at Sinai.) In other words, each part of the Mediterranean world is highlighted in some part of Genesis. The crucial center section of Genesis (chs. 12—36) is bracketed geographically by two sections of the Near Eastern world with whose history that of Israel would be constantly interlocked. . . .

"In chs. 1—11 we read of individuals who had land, but are either losing it or being expelled from it. In chs. 12—50 the emphasis is on individuals who do not have land, but are on the way toward it. One group is losing; another group is expecting.

"Genesis is moving us progressively from generation (chs. 1—2), to degeneration (chs. 3—11), to regeneration (chs. 12—50)."⁴²³

Chapters 1—11 present a structural pattern that carries over into the rest of the Pentateuch.

"The importance of Genesis 1—11 for the rest of the Pentateuch can be seen in the fact that its narrative structure provides a pattern by which the author often shapes subsequent pentateuchal narratives. Thus the order and arrangement of the Creation accounts in Genesis 1—2 exhibit the same pattern as the description of the building of the tabernacle (Ex 25—31); the tabernacle is portrayed as a return to the Garden of Eden. The instructions given to Noah for building the ark foreshadow those given to

⁴²³Hamilton, pp. 10, 11.

Moses for building the tabernacle. Furthermore, one can demonstrate that whole sections of laws in the Pentateuch have been grouped and arranged in patterns that parallel the narrative structure of Genesis 1—11."⁴²⁴

"The ancient oriental background to Gen 1—11 shows it to be concerned with rather different issues from those that tend to preoccupy modern readers. It is affirming the unity of God in the face of polytheism, his justice rather than his caprice, his power as opposed to his impotence, his concern for mankind rather than his exploitation. And whereas Mesopotamia clung to the wisdom of primeval man, Genesis records his sinful disobedience. Because as Christians we tend to assume these points in our theology, we often fail to recognize the striking originality of the message of Gen 1—11 and concentrate on subsidiary points that may well be of less moment."⁴²⁵

Some notable changes take place in the second part of Genesis. Instead of the genealogies being prominent and the stories secondary, as in chapters 1—11, the reverse becomes true now. God retreats farther into the background of the events recorded than was the case earlier, and there is corresponding emphasis on the personalities of the patriarchs. The promises to the patriarchs form the central theme of this section, especially those concerning descendants, land, and divine blessing. There also seems to be increasing depth in the moral awareness of the patriarchs as generation follows generation from Abram to Joseph.⁴²⁶

A. WHAT BECAME OF TERAH 11:27—25:11

A major theme of the Pentateuch is the partial fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs. The promises in Genesis 12:1-3 and 7 are the fountainhead from which the rest of the Pentateuch flows.⁴²⁷ Walter Kaiser labeled the three things promised Abram as an heir, a heritage, and an inheritance.⁴²⁸ David Clines called them posterity, relationship with God, and land.⁴²⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost and Robert L. Saucy referred to them as seed, blessing, and land.⁴³⁰

God progressively revealed more information about each of these promises. He gave more information about the land promise in 13:15, 17; 15:7-8, 18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3-4 (plural "lands"); 28:4, 13; 35:12; 48:4; and 50:24. Repetition of the seed promise occurs in 13:15-16; 15:5; 17:2, 5-10, 13, 16, 19-20; 18:18; 21:12; 22:17-18; 26:3-4, 24; 28:13-14; 32:12; 35:11-12; 46:3; and 48:4 and 16.

⁴²⁴Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 39.

⁴²⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 1.

⁴²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁴²⁷See *idem*, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 169.

⁴²⁸Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, pp. 35, 84-99.

⁴²⁹David Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, pp. 29, 45-60.

⁴³⁰J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 65-94; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 42.

"A line of successive representative sons of the patriarchs who were regarded as one with the whole group they represented matched the seminal idea already advocated in Genesis 3:15. Furthermore, in the concept of 'seed' were the two aspects of the seed as a future *benefit* and the seed as the present *beneficiaries* of God's temporal and spiritual gifts. Consequently, 'seed' was always a collective singular noun; never did it appear as a plural noun (e.g., as in 'sons'). Thereby the 'seed' was marked as a unit, yet with a flexibility of reference: now to the one person, now to the many descendants of that family. This interchange of reference with its implied corporate solidarity was more than a cultural phenomena or an accident of careless editing; it was part and parcel of its doctrinal intention."⁴³¹

The promise of universal blessing recurs in 18:18; 22:18 9 (to Abraham); 26:4 (to Isaac); and 28:14 (to Jacob).⁴³²

"While this promissory triad of blessing, seed, and land is the thematic cord binding the Book of Genesis, we find that the counterthemes of fratricide, violence, uncreation, and expulsion are the literary-theological foil for the promissory blessing."⁴³³

Genesis 12—50 focuses on the promise of posterity (an heir, seed), though the other promises receive much attention. Exodus and Leviticus center on the promise of worldwide influence (relationship with God, heritage, blessing), and Numbers and Deuteronomy emphasize the promise of real estate (land, inheritance, rest).

In Genesis 12—25 the problems of possessing the land and obtaining an heir dominate the story of Abram's life. How will Abram obtain the land, and who will be Abram's heir? These are the great questions that the thoughtful reader continually asks himself as he reads the story of Abram. At least one of them is central in every incident in his life that God has chosen to record in Genesis. These questions form the unifying theme of the Abram narrative.⁴³⁴

One writer called the form in which Moses revealed the Abram cycle of stories an "obstacle story."

"Few literary techniques have enjoyed so universal and perennial a vogue as the obstacle story. It is found in ancient and modern literature from the

⁴³¹Kaiser, *Toward an . . .*, pp. 88-89.

⁴³²God reiterated His purpose with additional detail to Abraham in 13:14-17; 17:1-21; and 22:15-18; to Isaac in 26:3-5, 24; and to Jacob in 28:13-15; and 35:9-12 (cf. 46:1-4).

⁴³³Mathews, p. 59.

⁴³⁴See Larry Helyer, "The Separation of Abram and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 26 (June 1983):77-88; Claus Westermann, "Promises to the Patriarchs," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*, pp. 690-93; Dixon Sutherland, "The Organization of the Abraham Promise Narrative," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95:3 (1983):337-43; Whybray, p. 55; Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 262.

Gilgamesh epic and the Odyssey to the Perils of Pauline and the latest novel. Its character is episodal in that it is not self-contained but finds its *raison d'etre* in its relation to the larger story or narrative of which it is a part. Its purpose is to arouse suspense and sustain interest by recounting episodes which threaten or retard the fulfillment of what the reader either suspects or hopes or knows to be the ending of the story."⁴³⁵

Twelve crises arise as the story of Abram's life unfolds. Each of these must be overcome and is overcome by God who eventually does provide Abram's descendants. Each of these problems constituted a challenge to Abram's faith. Is God faithful and powerful enough to provide what He has promised? In the end we can see that He is.

Each problem Abram encountered is typical of problems that every believer has to deal with in seeking to live by faith. Consequently each episode in Abram's life teaches us something about God's power and faithfulness and should enable us to live by faith more consistently. Moses originally recorded these lessons for Israel's benefit. Abram was not without his flaws, and his failings prove as instructive as his successes, as is true of all biblical characters.

The problems Abram's faith encountered were these.

1. Sarai was barren (11:30).
2. Abram had to leave the Promised Land (12:10).
3. Abram's life was in danger in Egypt (12:11-20).
4. Abram's nephew, Lot, strove with him over the land (ch. 13).
5. Abram entered a war (14:1-16).
6. Abram's life was in danger in the Promised Land (15:1).
7. God ruled Eliezer out as Abram's heir (15:2-3).
8. Hagar, pregnant with Abram's son (heir?), departed (16:6).
9. Abimelech threatened Sarai's reputation and child (heir?) in Gerar (ch. 20).
10. Abram had two heirs (21:8-11).
11. God commanded Abram to slay his heir (ch. 22).
12. Abram could not find a proper wife for his heir (24:5).

". . . the narrator has skillfully woven this material together in such a way as to involve the reader/listener in a drama of increasing tension between, on the one hand, the promise of Yahweh that Abram would have an heir and, indeed, would become the father of many nations, and, on the other, the threat to the fulfillment of this promise by a series of crises."⁴³⁶

1. Terah and Abram's obedience 11:27—12:9

All that Moses wrote in this pericope (11:27—12:9) deals with Abram and his future in the Promised Land. Abram obeyed the Lord's command to leave his homeland for a land God would provide with the promise that he would be a blessing to the rest of the world.

⁴³⁵Peter E. Ellis, *The Yahwist, the Bible's First Theologian*, p. 136.

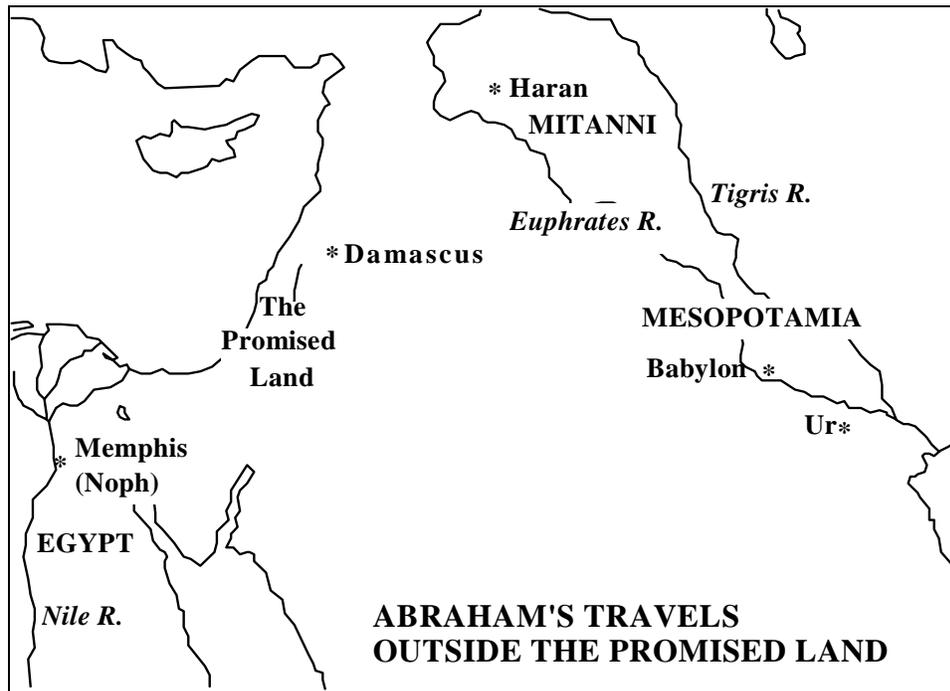
⁴³⁶Helyer, p. 80.

Abram's example of obedience is a model for all believers to forsake all else to obtain the promised blessings of God and to serve Him by becoming a blessing to others.

"Within the book of Genesis no section is more significant than 11:27—12:9."⁴³⁷

Abram's ancestors 11:27-32

"The function of this genealogy is not so much to connect Abraham with the preceding events, as the previous genealogies have done, but to provide the reader with the necessary background for understanding the events in the life of Abraham. The list includes eight names. All the individuals named are relevant for understanding the events of the following narrative except 'Iscah' (v. 29). The inclusion of this otherwise insignificant name in the list suggests that the author is seeking to achieve a specific number of names. Thus far in the Book of Genesis, the author has followed a pattern of listing ten names between important individuals in the narrative. In this short list only eight names are given, hence if we are expecting ten names, the number of individuals in this list appears to be short by two names. By listing only eight names, the author leaves the reader uncertain who the ninth and, more importantly, the tenth name will be. It is only as the narrative unfolds that the ninth and tenth names are shown to be the two sons of Abraham, 'Ishmael' (16:15) and 'Isaac' (21:3)."⁴³⁸



Abram evidently grew up in the city of Ur.

⁴³⁷Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 281.

⁴³⁸Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 109.

"Ur is well known as an important center in the land of Sumer; it reached its zenith under the kings of the third dynasty of Ur, who around 2060-1950 B.C. [Abram was born ca. 2166 B.C.] revived for the last time the ancient cultural traditions of the Sumerians. The names of several of Abram's relatives are also the names of known cities: . . . *Terah* . . . *Nahor* . . . *Serug* . . . *Haran* . . . and Laban the *Aramean*, Jacob's father-in-law, was from the city *Haran* in *Paddan-aram*. All these are places around the river Balih in northern Mesopotamia. Haran and Nahor are often mentioned in the Mari documents of the eighteenth century B.C., and cities named Tell-terah and Serug are known from later Assyrian sources."⁴³⁹

A later writer probably added the reference to the Chaldeans in verse 28 since the Chaldeans did not enter Babylonia until about 1,000 B.C.⁴⁴⁰

"The movement between Ur and Haran becomes easy to understand when we recall that Ur was the greatest commercial capital that the world had yet seen" ⁴⁴¹

God first called Abram to leave his home when the patriarch still lived in Ur (12:1-3; cf. 15:7; Neh. 9:7; Acts 7:2). Abram's family members were polytheists (Josh. 24:2).⁴⁴² Abram married his half-sister, Sarai, which was not contrary to God's will at this early date in history (cf. Lev. 18:9; 20:17; Deut. 27:22). God's call was pure grace; there is no evidence in the text that God chose Abram because he merited favor. God was beginning to form a family of faithful followers for Himself. He called them to leave this urban center in trust and obedience.

Abram's family stayed in Haran for some time (vv. 31-32).

"The difference between Terah and Abraham was one thing only: a response of faith to God's call."⁴⁴³

When the patriarch Terah died, Abram continued his trek toward Canaan in obedience to God's call.

⁴³⁹*The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, p. 28.

⁴⁴⁰Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 272.

⁴⁴¹W. F. Albright, "Abram the Hebrew: A New Archaeological Interpretation," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 163 (October 1961):44. See *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, map 25.

⁴⁴²According to Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 252, "Several of Abram's relations have names that suggest adherence to lunar worship (cf. Sarah, Milcah, Laban), a cult that was prominent in Ur and Haran." Cf. Josh. 24:2.

⁴⁴³George Van Pelt Campbell, "Refusing God's Blessing: An Exposition of Genesis 11:27-32," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:659 (July-September 2008):282.

"Like Nuzi, Haran was also part of the Hurrian Mitanni Empire whilst the Hurrians were at the height of their power, so that the tablets discovered at Nuzi would also reflect the way of life in Haran. In this manner, scholars have ascertained from a careful study of the Nuzi tablets that they are very helpful in explaining many of the Biblical episodes relating to the Patriarchs, which had hitherto been somewhat puzzling.

"Although the Bible indicates that Abram eventually left Haran (Genesis 12:4), the Patriarchs nevertheless kept in close contact with that city. Abram sent his servant back to Aram-naharaim, the region in which Haran was situated, in order to find a wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24:2-10). Isaac later told his younger son Jacob to flee to his uncle Laban in Haran, in order to escape the wrath of his brother Esau, whom he had tricked out of his birthright blessing (Genesis 27:43). Jacob indeed fled to Haran, subsequently marrying there his cousins Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29:1-30).

"The influence of Hurrian society on the Patriarchs was undoubtedly very strong, not only because of the origins of Abram in Mesopotamia, but also because all the Patriarchs maintained contact with the area. This is borne out by the fact that many of the incidents in the Biblical narratives relating to the Patriarchs in reality reflect Hurrian social and legal customs, and prove beyond reasonable doubt that the Patriarchal way of life had its roots in Hurrian society."⁴⁴⁴

"In the period (the first part of the Middle Bronze Age [ca. 2000-1750 B.C.]) Palestine was receiving an infusion of population as semi-nomadic groups infiltrated the land. . . .

"That these newcomers were 'Amorites,' of the same Northwest-Semitic stock as those whom we have met in Mesopotamia, can scarcely be doubted. Their names, so far as these are known, point unanimously in that direction. Their mode of life is splendidly illustrated by the Tale of Sinuhe, but especially by the stories of Genesis—for it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the migration of Israel's ancestors was a part of this very movement. These people brought to Palestine no fundamental ethnic change, for they were of the same general Northwest-Semitic stock as were the Canaanites."⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴Stuart West, "The Nuzi Tablets," *Bible and Spade* 10:3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1981):66. We should be careful not to overemphasize the influence of Hurrian civilization, however, as Ephraim Speiser, for example, did in his commentary on Genesis. See M. J. Selman, "The Social Environment of the Patriarchs," *Tyndale Bulletin* 27 (1976):114-36. Archaeologists have dated the Nuzi tablets four or five hundred years after the patriarchs, but they reflect customs that had been prevalent for centuries.

⁴⁴⁵Bright, pp. 48-49.

| MAJOR HISTORICAL PERIODS OF THE PROMISED LAND | |
|--|----------------------|
| Stone (Neolithic) Age | to ca. 4000 BC (?) |
| Copper (Calcolithic) Age | ca. 4000-3150 BC (?) |
| Early Bronze Age I | 3150-2850 BC |
| Early Bronze Age II | 2850-2650 BC |
| Early Bronze Age III | 2650-2350 BC |
| Early Bronze Age IV | 2350-2200 BC |
| Middle Bronze Age I | 2200-2000 BC |
| Middle Bronze Age IIA | 2000-1750 BC |
| Middle Bronze Age IIB | 1750-1630 BC |
| Middle Bronze Age IIC | 1630-1550 BC |
| Late Bronze Age I | 1550-1400 BC |
| Late Bronze Age IIA | 1400-1300 BC |
| Late Bronze Age IIB | 1300-1200 BC |
| Iron Age I | 1200-1000 BC |
| Iron Age II | 1000-586 BC |
| Babylonian/Persian Period | 586-332 BC |
| Hellenistic Period I (Ptolemaic and Seleucid) | 332-152 BC |
| Hellenistic Period II (Hasmonean) | 152-37 BC |
| Roman Period I (Herodian) | 37 BC-AD 70 |
| Roman Period II | AD 70-180 |
| Roman Period III | AD 180-324 |
| Byzantine Period (Christian) | AD 324-640 |
| Arab Period (Moslem) | AD 640-1099 |
| Crusader Period (Christian) | AD 1099-1291 |
| Mameluk Period (Moslem) | AD 1291-1517 |
| Turkish Period (Moslem) | AD 1517-1917 |
| British Mandate Period (Christian) | AD 1917-1948 |
| State of Israel Period (Jewish) | 1948 - today |

The divine promises 12:1-9

"These verses are of fundamental importance for the theology of Genesis, for they serve to bind together the primeval history and the later patriarchal history and look beyond it to the subsequent history of the nation."⁴⁴⁶

"Whereas chapters 1—11 generally portray man's rebellion, chapters 12—50 detail God's bringing man into a place of blessing."⁴⁴⁷

". . . this is the central passage of the Book of Genesis."⁴⁴⁸

God's revelation to Abram in these verses explains why his family left Ur (11:31).

". . . by placing the call of Abraham after the dispersion of the nations at Babylon (11:1-9), the author intends to picture Abraham's call as God's gift of salvation in the midst of judgment."⁴⁴⁹

"The primeval history thus explains the significance of the patriarchal story: though apparently of little consequence in the world of their day, the patriarchs are in fact men through whom the world will be redeemed. The God who revealed himself to them was no mere tribal deity but the creator of the whole universe."⁴⁵⁰

The fourth dispensation, the dispensation of promise, extended from Abram's call to the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19—24). Man's stewardship rested on God's promises to Abram, which appear first in 12:1-3 but receive confirmation and enlargement in 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8, 15-19; 22:16-18; 26:2-5, 24; 28:13-15; 31:13; and 35:9-12. Individual blessing depended on individual obedience (12:1; 22:18; 26:5). God unconditionally promised blessing through Abram's descendants to the nation of Israel (12:2; 15:18-21; 17:7-8), to the church through Christ (Gal. 3:16, 28-29), and to the Gentile nations (12:3). Individuals (e.g., Pharaoh, 12:17; Abimelech, 20:3, 17) and nations (e.g., Egypt, chs. 47—50; Exod. 1—15) that proved favorable toward Abram's seed would experience divine blessing, but those that proved hostile would experience divine cursing (12:3; cf. Matt. 25:31-46). Christians are called upon to trust God as Abram did and so enter into the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, which covenant inaugurated the dispensation of promise (Rom. 4:11, 16, 23-25; Gal. 3:6-9). God's promises to Abram and his descendants did not end with the giving of the Mosaic Law (Gal. 3:17; cf. Exod. 32:13; 33:1-3; Lev. 23:10; 25:2; 26:6; Deut. 6:1-23; 8:1-18; Josh. 1:2, 11; 24:13; Acts 7:17; Rom. 9:4). However as a test of Israel's stewardship of divine truth, the dispensation of promise was superseded, not annulled, by the dispensation of law (Exod. 19:3-8).

⁴⁴⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 274.

⁴⁴⁷Ross, "Genesis," p. 25.

⁴⁴⁸Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁴⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 139.

⁴⁵⁰Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. li-lii.

God's word 12:1-3

12:1 This section begins with a *waw* disjunctive in the Hebrew text translated "Now" in the NASB. It introduces an independent circumstantial clause (cf. 1:2). Probably the revelation in view happened in Ur. The NIV captures this with the translation "The Lord had said to Abram." So the beginning of chapter 12 flashes back to something that happened in Ur even though chapter 11 ends with Abram in Haran. Stephen's statement in Acts 7:2 supports this interpretation.⁴⁵¹

God called Abram to separate himself from his homeland and to proceed to a different country. That Abram's family chose to accompany him does not imply an act of disobedience on Abram's part. God did not forbid others from accompanying Abram. The focus of God's command was that Abram should uproot himself and follow His leading.

"One detail we do need to note here is the conditional element in the covenant program with Abram. It was not until after the death of his father (Gen. 11:32) that Abram began to realize anything of the promise God had given to him, for only after his father's death did God take him into the land (12:4) and there reaffirm the original promise to him (12:7).

"It is important, therefore, to observe the relationship of obedience to this covenant program. Whether or not God would institute a covenant program with Abram depended on Abram's act of obedience in leaving the land. Once this act was accomplished, however, and Abram did obey God, God instituted an irrevocable, *unconditional* program."⁴⁵²

". . . in what sense is the Abrahamic covenant [ch. 15] unconditional? The point here, which has often been misunderstood, is that *while the fulfillment of any particular generation of Israel depended on obedience to God, the ultimate possession of the land is promised unconditionally to Israel even though she does not deserve it*. Scripture prophesies that a godly remnant of Israel will be the ultimate possessors of the land at the second coming (Ezek. 20:33-38)."⁴⁵³

⁴⁵¹Stephen quoted the Septuagint translation of this verse in Acts 7:3.

⁴⁵²Pentecost, p. 60. See also Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Evidence from Genesis," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 54.

⁴⁵³Walvoord, p. 191.

12:2-3

Abram had only a promise from God. We see his faith in his willingness to obey God strictly in the confidence that what God had promised He would perform (Heb. 11:8). This divine promise was the seed from which the Abrahamic Covenant grew (ch. 15). The promise here included few details; it was only a general promise of descendants (v. 2) and influence (vv. 2-3). The Hebrew text says, "be a blessing" (v. 2), not "you shall be a blessing." This was a command rather than a prediction. However as Abram blessed others he would become a blessing (i.e., enriched, as in enriched uranium or plutonium). God would make his life more rich and powerful, and he would enrich the lives of others.

"The promises that this glorious God gave to Abram fall into three categories (Gen. 12:2-3). First there were *personal* promises given to Abram. God said, 'I will bless you; I will make your name great.' Then there were *national* promises given to this childless man. 'I will make you into a great nation.' And finally there were *universal* promises that were to come through Abram. 'You will be a blessing . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"⁴⁵⁴

"Five times in vv 2-3 Abraham is said to be 'blessed' or a 'blessing' to others. This harks back to the first great blessing of mankind at creation (1:28) and its renewal after the flood (9:1). Moreover, Abraham is to become 'a great nation,' comparable presumably to the seventy nations listed in Gen 10. His name will also be 'great,' whereas the men of Babel who tried to make themselves 'a name' were frustrated (11:4-9)."⁴⁵⁵

The three nuances of blessing include prosperity (13:2, 5; 14:22-23; 24:35; 26:12-13; 30:43; 32:3-21), potency or fertility (1:28; 13:16; 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 28:3, 14; 35:11) and victory (1:22; cf. 22:17).

The Hebrew words translated "curse" in verse 3 are significant. The word *qll* in "the one who curses you" really means "disdains," but the word *'rr* in "I will curse" means "curse." It was only disdain for Abraham that would provoke God's judgment.

God's ultimate purpose was to bless all the peoples of the earth through Abraham and his seed.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴Pentecost, pp. 51-52. See Z. Weisman, "National Consciousness in the Patriarchal Promises," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31 (February 1985):55-73.

⁴⁵⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 282.

⁴⁵⁶William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 65, explained how the Hebrew construction of verses 1-3 makes this evident.

"Any promise God gives must be appropriated by faith."⁴⁵⁷

"The remarkable thing about Abraham was his deep, unwavering faith."⁴⁵⁸

The amillennial interpretation of this promise is that it "does not pertain today to unbelieving, ethnic 'Israel' (see Rom. 9:6-8; Gal. 3:15) but to Jesus Christ and his church (see 12:7; 13:16 and notes; Gal. 3:16, 26-29; 6:16)."⁴⁵⁹ This interpretation applies the promise to the spiritual seed of Abraham and not to the physical seed. However, there is no reason for accepting this more obscure explanation. Abraham understood the promise as applying to his physical descendants, and later revelation encourages us to understand it this way too.

| REVELATIONS TO THE PATRIARCHS | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Abraham | Isaac | Jacob | Joseph |
| Gen. 12:1-3 | Gen. 26:2-5 | Gen. 28:12-15 | Gen. 37:5-7 |
| Gen. 12:7 | Gen. 26:24 | Gen. 31:3 | Gen. 37:9 |
| Gen. 13:14-17 | | Gen. 31:11-13 | |
| Gen. 15 | | Gen. 32:24-29 | |
| Gen. 17:1-21 | | Gen. 35:1 | |
| Gen. 18 | | Gen. 35:9-12 | |
| Gen. 21:12-13 | | Gen. 46:2-4 | |
| Gen. 22:1-2 | | | |
| Gen. 22:15-18 | | | |

Abram's response 12:4-9

12:4 Since Lot voluntarily chose to accompany Abram, he probably believed the promises as well (cf. Ruth). Abram's call had been to separate from his pagan relatives, so he was not disobedient by allowing Lot to accompany him.⁴⁶⁰

Possibly Abram viewed Lot as his heir (cf. 11:27-32; 12:4-5; 13:1-2).

⁴⁵⁷Pentecost, pp. 51-52.

⁴⁵⁸Davis, p. 168.

⁴⁵⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 206.

⁴⁶⁰See *ibid.*, p. 207.

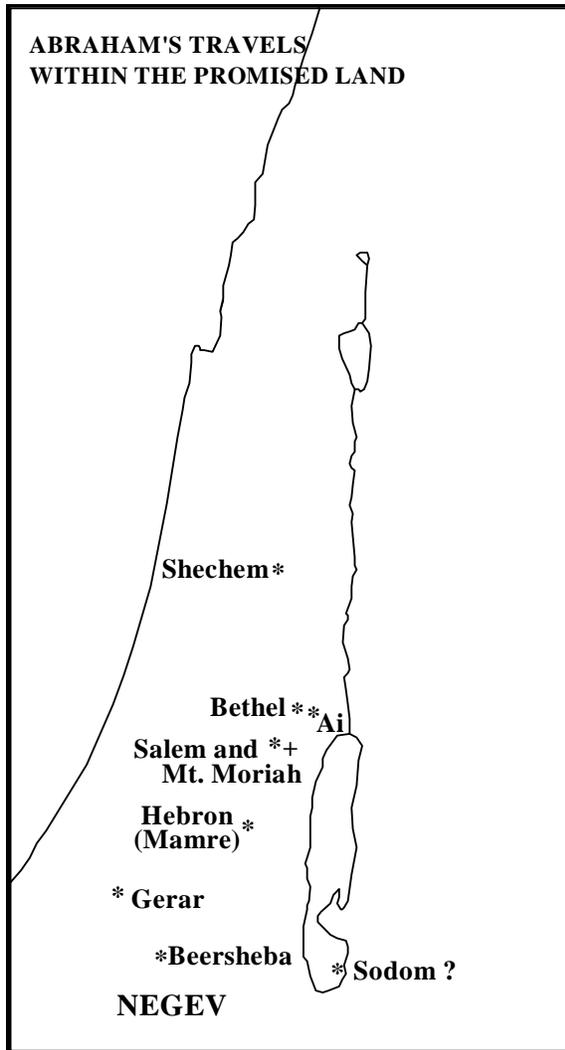
"Since Mesopotamian law-codes allowed for the adoption of an heir in the case of childlessness, this becomes an attractive hypothesis with respect to Lot."⁴⁶¹

Abram lived 75 years with his father, then 25 years without his father or his son, and then 75 more years with his son, Isaac.

12:5-6 Abram's first settlement was in Shechem.

". . . towns on the main caravan route southwestward from the Euphrates which figure significantly in the Abram stories, are Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and Gerar."⁴⁶²

Shechem became sacred to the Israelites because here God revealed Himself to Abram for the first time in the Promised Land. This was God's second major revelation to Abram. At Shechem Jacob later bought land, set up his home, and buried his idols in rededication to Yahweh after returning from his sojourn in Paddan-aram (33:18-20; 35:4). Here, too, the Israelites assembled twice when they had taken possession of Canaan under Joshua's leadership to commemorate God's faithfulness in giving them the land He had promised their forefathers (Josh. 8; 24). Shechem was near the geographic center of Canaan (cf. Josh. 20:7). It lay in the heart of the land God now promised Abram. "Moreh" means "teacher," so the tree of Moreh may have been a pagan site for oracles.



⁴⁶¹Helyer, p. 82.

⁴⁶²Albright, p. 47.

The reference to the Canaanites' presence in the land prepares the way for incidents of conflict with these native inhabitants that followed in Israel's history (cf. 10:15-19). It also notes a barrier to the fulfillment of God's promise to give Abram and his heirs the land (v. 7). Abram could not take possession of the Promised Land immediately because the Canaanites occupied it.

- 12:7 In response to God's promise to give Abram the land where he stood the patriarch built an altar and worshipped Yahweh. This was Abram's characteristic response to God's grace. Abram's altars were more permanent structures than his tents. He continued living as a pilgrim and stranger in a land that he did not yet possess (Heb. 11:9-10).
- 12:8 Abram proceeded south and encamped between Bethel and Ai (probably et Tell⁴⁶³) just north of Salem (Jerusalem). Again he built an altar to worship Yahweh and called on His name in worship.
- 12:9 He next continued south toward the Negev (lit. dry), perhaps because of a shortage of food for his grazing animals (v. 10).

The nation of Israel in Moses' day shared the same call that God had extended to Abram. She was to leave her place of residence, Egypt, and go to a Promised Land to worship and serve God there with the promise of blessing. This required faith. We have a similar calling. Believers who walk by faith will forsake much to become part of God's program to bless the world.

"Departure from securities is the only way out of barrenness."⁴⁶⁴

2. Abram in Egypt 12:10-20

The second crisis Abram faced arose because of a famine in Canaan. Abram chose to sojourn in the Nile Valley until it was past. In this incident Abram tried to pass Sarai off as his sister because he feared for his life. By doing so, he jeopardized his blessing since he lost his wife temporarily to Pharaoh. However, Yahweh intervened to deliver Abram and Sarai from Egypt.

"The account of Abraham's 'sojourn' in Egypt bears the stamp of having been intentionally shaped to parallel the later account of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Gen 41—Exod 12). Both passages have a similar message as well. Thus, here, at the beginning of the narratives dealing with Abraham and his seed, we find an anticipation of the events that will occur at the end. . . . Behind the pattern stands a faithful, loving God.

⁴⁶³Peter Briggs, "Testing the Factuality of the Conquest of Ai Narrative in the Book of Joshua," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, CO, Nov. 15, 2001.

⁴⁶⁴Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 118.

What he has done with Abraham, he will do for his people today and tomorrow."⁴⁶⁵

Though Bible students debate the point, I believe Abram rushed ahead of God by going to Egypt without a divine revelation that he should do so.⁴⁶⁶ God blessed Abram in Egypt in spite of Abram's lack of faith and then returned him to the Promised Land. Another severe famine (v. 10) later encouraged Jacob and his family to sojourn in Egypt (47:4), but God gave Jacob permission to go (46:2-4). It was evidently fear rather than faith that made Abram leave the Promised Land.

"Throughout Gen. 12—50 Egypt is a symbol of safety and provision for the patriarchs and their families. If anything, Egypt is the oppressed in Genesis. Note that it is Sarai who 'dealt harshly' with her Egyptian maidservant, forcing her 'to flee' (16:6). Later she urges her husband to 'cast out' this Egyptian."⁴⁶⁷

Some commentators have concluded that in dealing with Sarai as he did Abram was relying on a custom of the land from which he had come to protect him. They suggest that this custom was evidently unknown in Egypt. Because he failed to perceive this, Abram got into trouble.

"The thrice repeated story [involving Abraham in 12:10-20 and 20:1-18, and Isaac in 26:6-12] has been the subject of much discussion by commentators through the ages, but only with the discoveries at Nuzi has it become clear that Abraham and Isaac were not involved in any trickery, but were endeavoring to protect their respective wives from molestation by invoking the Hurrian custom or law of wife-sistership. According to the Nuzi tablets a woman having the status of wife-sister rather than that of just an ordinary wife, enjoyed superior privileges and was better protected. The status was a purely legal one, a wife-sister being quite distinct from the physical relationship usually understood by the word 'sister.' In order to create the status of wife-sistership two documents were prepared—one for marriage and the other for sistership. Thus, we find a Nuzi tablet, according to which a person by the name of Akkuleni, son of Akiya, contracted with one Hurazzi, son of Eggaya, to give to Hurazzi in marriage his sister Beltakkadummi. Another tablet records that the same Akkuleni sold his sister Beltakkadummi as sister to the same Hurazzi. If such a marriage was violated, the punishment was much more severe than in the case of a straightforward ordinary marriage. It would appear that the actions of Abraham and Isaac reflect this custom."⁴⁶⁸

In the Hurrian culture from which Abram came people evidently viewed the husband wife-sister relationship as even more sacred than the husband wife relationship. According to this view, when Abram went to Egypt he assumed that the Egyptians also

⁴⁶⁵Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 116-17.

⁴⁶⁶See Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 213; J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth: The Romance of Redemption*, p. 51. For the view that Abram did not do wrong in going to Egypt, see Kidner, pp. 115-16.

⁴⁶⁷Hamilton, p. 386. See Peter D. Miscall, *The Workings of Old Testament Narrative*, pp. 42-45.

⁴⁶⁸West, p. 67. See also Speiser, pp. 91-92.

regarded the husband wife-sister relationship as more sacred than the husband wife relationship. Therefore he presented Sarai as his wife-sister and expected that the Egyptians would not interfere with his relationship with Sarai. However proponents of this view assume the husband wife-sister relationship was foreign to Pharaoh. He took Sarai because he believed that she was Abram's physical sister. When he discovered that Sarai was also Abram's wife he returned Sarai to Abram because Pharaoh regarded the husband wife relationship as sacred. He was angry with Abram because in Pharaoh's eyes Abram had misrepresented his relationship with Sarai.

Those who hold this view see this incident as an example of failure to adjust to a foreign culture and failure to trust God. They usually understand Abram's motivation as having been confidence in a cultural custom from his past rather than faith in God.⁴⁶⁹

Most interpreters have concluded that Abram, on the contrary, was not being completely honest and straightforward about his relationship with Sarai, but was telling a half-truth to save his own life (cf. 20:12). Evidently it was possible for brothers to fend off suitors of their sisters with promises of marriage without really giving them away (cf. 24:55; 34:13-17). How would God fulfill His promises if Abram died now? His fears were understandable; Pharaoh did take Sarai into his harem. Nevertheless God intervened supernaturally to reunite Abram with Sarai and to return them to the Promised Land (by deportation).⁴⁷⁰

Abram's fear for his physical safety in a strange land (v. 2) led him to take an initiative that was not God's will. He should have told the truth and continued trusting God. Yet even in his disobedience and lack of faith God blessed Abram (v. 16) and preserved him (v. 20) because of His promises (12:1-3).

"One cannot miss the deliberate parallelism between this sojourn of Abram in Egypt and the later event in the life of the nation in bondage in Egypt. The motifs are remarkably similar: the famine in the land (12:10; 47:13), the descent to Egypt to sojourn (12:10; 47:27), the attempt to kill the males but save the females (12:12; Ex. 1:22), the plagues on Egypt (Gen. 12:17; Ex. 7:14—11:10), the spoiling of Egypt (Gen. 12:16; Ex. 12:35-36), the deliverance (Gen. 12:19; Ex. 15), and the ascent to the Negev (Gen. 13:1; Num. 13:17, 22). The great deliverance out of bondage that Israel experienced was thus already accomplished in her ancestor, and probably was a source of comfort and encouragement to them."⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹For refutation of this view, see C. J. Mullo Weir, "The Alleged Hurrian Wife-Sister Motif in Genesis," *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 2:22 (1967-68):14-25; David Freedman, "A New Approach to the Nuzi Sistership Contract," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 2:2 (1970):80; Samuel Greengus, "Sisterhood Adoption at Nuzi and the 'Wife-Sister' in Genesis," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975):5-31; "The Patriarchs' Wives as Sisters—Is the Anchor Bible Wrong?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 1:3 (September 1975):22-24, 26; Selman, pp. 119-23; and Kitchen, *The Bible . . .*, p. 70. For information on three social classes of Babylonian women 200 years after Abraham, see J. M. Diakonoff, "Women in Old Babylonia Not Under Patriarchal Authority," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 29:3 (October 1984):225-38.

⁴⁷⁰For a helpful though not entirely accurate study, from my viewpoint, which compares the three incidents in which the patriarchs claimed their wives were their sisters in Genesis 12, 20, and 26, see Robert Polzin, "The Ancestress of Israel in Danger' in Danger," *Semeia* 3 (1975):81-98.

⁴⁷¹Ross, "Genesis," p. 49. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 217.

We sometimes feel tempted to fear for our welfare, especially in a foreign environment. This fear sometimes leads us to seize the initiative and disobey God. We can count on God to fulfill His promises to us in spite of threatening circumstances. We should remain faithful and honest.

"The integrity and honesty of a child of God are among his most potent weapons in spreading the gospel."⁴⁷²

The Pharaoh (lit. Great House) Abram dealt with in Egypt was probably Inyotef II (2117-2069 B.C.), a ruler of the eleventh dynasty, Middle Kingdom period. His capital was in Memphis, very near modern Cairo.

| IDENTIFICATIONS OF SIGNIFICANT PHARAHOHS IN THE GENESIS PERIOD ⁴⁷³ |
|--|
| <p>PREHISTORY (to ca. 3100 BC)</p> <p>EARLY DYNASTIES (dynasties 1-2; ca. 3100-2686 BC)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Menes (first Pharaoh) united upper and lower Egypt.</p> <p>OLD KINGDOM (dynasties 3-6; ca. 2686-2181 BC) Capital: Memphis (Noph). Period of absolute power. Age of pyramid building (archaeologists have identified almost 80).</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Djoser (Zoser; 2nd Pharaoh of 3rd dynasty) built the first stepped pyramid (south of Cairo).</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Cheops (Khufu; 2nd Pharaoh of 4th dynasty) built the Great (largest) Pyramid at Gizeh (near Cairo).</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Chephren (Khafre; 4th Pharaoh of 4th dynasty) built the still capped pyramid near the Sphinx (near Cairo).</p> <p>FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD (dynasties 7-10; ca. 2181-2040 BC) Capital: Thebes (No)</p> <p>MIDDLE KINGDOM (dynasties 11-14; ca. 2033-1603 BC) Capital: Memphis (Noph). Period of culture and civilization.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Inyotef II (2117-2069 BC; 3rd Pharaoh of 11th dynasty) entertained Abram (Gen. 12:15).</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Ammenemes II (1929-1895 BC; 3rd Pharaoh of 12th dynasty) ruled when Joseph arrived in Egypt (Gen. 37:36).</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Sesostris II (1897-1878 BC; 4th Pharaoh of 12th dynasty) had his dreams interpreted by Joseph and exalted Joseph (Gen. 40:2; 41:1, 14-45).</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Sesostris III (1878-1843 BC; 5th Pharaoh of 12th dynasty) ruled when Jacob entered Egypt and received a blessing from Jacob (Gen. 46:31; 47:10).</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Ammenemes III (1842-1797 BC; 6th Pharaoh of 12th dynasty) ruled when Joseph died (Gen. 50:26).</p> |

⁴⁷²Davis, p. 178.

⁴⁷³Based on the *Cambridge Ancient History*. All identifications are probable.

| SYNOPTIC CHRONOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|---------------------|
| Dates | Periods | Ancient Near East | Canaan | Scripture |
| 3150–2200 B.C. ⁴⁷⁴ | Early Bronze Age (Early Canaanite) | Egypt: Old Kingdom (pyramid builders). Mesopotamia: Sumer and Akkad. | No written records until the Ebla tablets. Excavations show rich and powerful city-states. | Genesis 5—11 |
| 2200–1500 B.C. | Middle Bronze Age (Middle Canaanite) | Egypt: Middle Kingdom. Amorites (Hyksos) control Egypt and Canaan. | Amorites and Hebrew patriarchs in Canaan and Egypt | Genesis 12—50 |
| 1500–1200 B.C. | Late Bronze Age (Late Canaanite) | Egypt expels the Amorites and controls Canaan. | Egyptians, Canaanites (El Amarna Age). Conquest by Joshua. Early Judges, Philistines, Midianites, Ammonites, Moabites, etc. | Exodus— Judges |
| 1200–930 B.C. | Iron Age I (Israelite I) | Egyptian influence weakening. Syrian and Assyrian influence not yet developed. | Later Judges, Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon. | Judges— 1 Kings |
| 930–586 B.C. | Iron Age II (Israelite II) | Egypt weak, but Shishak attacks Canaan after Solomon's death. Syria (Aram) develops into serious rival for Israel. | Divided Kingdom | 1 Kings— 2 Kings |

The first reference to camels in Scripture occurs in verse 16. For many years, scholars believed that the ancients did not domesticate camels until much later in history than the patriarchal period. They believed that references to camels in Genesis indicated historical

⁴⁷⁴In your Old Testament studies you may discover writers describing the "before Christ" (B.C.) period as B.C.E. This stands for "before the common era." These writers also refer to the A.D. (Lat. *anno domini*, "year of our Lord") period as C.E., the "common era."

inaccuracies. However, the archaeological evidence for the early domestication of camels has proved these critics wrong.⁴⁷⁵ The Hebrew word does not distinguish whether these were one or two-humped camels.

God will protect His plan even when His people complicate it with deception. Consequently believers should not try to deliver themselves from threatening situations by deceptive schemes but should continue to trust and obey God.

"Here Abram's failure in the face of hostility, like Israel's sinfulness in the wilderness, is surely recorded as a warning for later generations (cf. 1 Cor 10:11) and as an illustration of the invincibility of the divine promises (cf. Rom 11:29)."⁴⁷⁶

3. Abram's separation from Lot ch. 13

This chapter records how Abram, though threatened with major conflict with Lot because of their herdsmen's strife, magnanimously gave his nephew his choice of what land he wanted. Lot took an area that was very fertile, though inhabited by wicked people. In return God blessed Abram with a reaffirmation of His promise. This was the fourth crisis Abram faced.

13:1-4 Abram returned from Egypt through the Negev and settled down near his former location between Bethel and Ai.

"Of special interest is that in Genesis 12:10—13:4 Lot occupies the same position as that of the 'mixed multitude' (Ex 12:38) in the narrative of Genesis 41—Exodus 12. In other words the author apparently wants to draw the reader's attention to the identification of Lot with the 'mixed multitude.' It is as if Lot is seen in these narratives as the prefiguration of the 'mixed multitude' that comes out of Egypt with the Israelites."⁴⁷⁷

13:5-7 When it became clear that there was not enough pasture to sustain all the flocks of both Abram and Lot, Abram suggested that Lot separate from him. He gave his nephew the choice of where he wanted to settle. This was a magnanimous gesture on Abram's part. If he was older than Lot, which is probable, it shows even greater graciousness.

Lot would have been the most likely candidate for the role of Abram's heir since Sarai was barren. He was a part of Abram's household and a blood relative (nephew). Abram probably regarded Lot at this time as the heir through whom God would fulfill His promises.

⁴⁷⁵See John J. Davis, "The Camel in Biblical Narratives," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, pp. 141-52.

⁴⁷⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 292.

⁴⁷⁷Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 38.

13:8-10 In offering Lot either the "left" or the "right" (v. 9) Abram was evidently suggesting that he and Lot partition the Promised Land; he would take one part and his nephew the other (cf. 22:3-10). Important to our appreciation of Abram's offer is knowledge of the fact that the Hebrews, as well as other ancient peoples, were eastern oriented (as contrasted with northern oriented, as we are). Abram and Lot were probably looking east when Abram made his suggestion (v. 9). Thus "Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the valley of the Jordan" (v. 10), which was to the east of where they stood (perhaps on Mt. Asor, the highest point in that part of Canaan, and only a short walk from both Bethel and Ai). Thus when Abram offered Lot what was on his left he was referring to northern Canaan, the area around Shechem (cf. 12:6; 33:18—34:31; 37:12-17) as far south as Bethel and Ai. The other choice was what was on their right: southern Canaan including Hebron and the Negev (cf. 13:6, 9; 13:1, 18; 20:1; et al.). Both men had previously lived in both regions.

Moses' description of the Jordan valley as being similar to Egypt (v. 10) should have warned the Israelite readers of Genesis against desiring to return to Egypt (cf. Exod. 16:3; Num. 11:5; 14:2-3).

13:11-13 Lot, however, chose neither of these options, north or south. Instead he decided to move east into the valley of the Jordan (v. 11). Earlier we read that Adam, Eve, and Cain traveled east after they sinned (3:24; 4:16) and that the people of Babel went east and rebelled against God (11:2). Thus Lot's move east makes us a bit uneasy (cf. 12:3). At this time the Jordan River was the eastern border of Canaan that continued south from the southeastern end of the Salt (Dead) Sea and southwest toward Kadesh (lit. cultic shrine) Barnea (10:19). It then proceeded to the Great (Mediterranean) Sea along the Wadi el Arish (Brook of Egypt; cf. Num. 34:1-12; Josh. 15:1-12). The text contrasts "the land of Canaan" with "the cities of the Valley" (v. 12). The place Lot chose to settle was on the eastern frontier of the Promised Land (v. 11).

"... this choice by Lot made rather final the rupture between him and Abram."⁴⁷⁸

Lot's choice erected another hurdle for Abram's faith in the promises of God and precipitated another crisis in the "obstacle story" of how God would fulfill His promises to Abram. Lot chose the Jordan Valley.

"Due to the combination of water (emerging from underground springs fed by the limestone hills farther west [of Jericho]), soil (deposited on the plain from the same hills) and climate (warm and sunny during most of the

⁴⁷⁸Harold Stigers, *Commentary on Genesis*, p. 146.

year), the region is known for all types of agricultural products, especially dates and balsam (used in ancient ointments). . . . It is not surprising that Lot, who with Abraham had lived for a short time in the lush Nile Valley of Egypt [chose as he did] . . . His choice appears to have been made from the mountains northeast of Bethel, with a view of the Jericho oasis or the Plains of Moab."⁴⁷⁹

Lot's choice seems to have been influenced to some extent by a desire to ally with the native inhabitants (cf. 13:7, 12; 19:1-26) as well as by the natural fruitfulness of the Jordan Valley (v. 10).

"In any given situation, what you are determines what you see, and what you see determines what you do."⁴⁸⁰

"The close parallels between the two [cities, i.e., Babylon and Sodom] which are created in the narrative of chapter 13 suggest that the author intends both cities to tell the same story. As in the case of parallels and repetitions throughout the book, the double account of God's destruction of the 'city in the east' is intended to drive home the point that God's judgment of the wicked is certain and imminent (cf. 41:32)."⁴⁸¹

13:14-17 Abram was now without an heir. However, Yahweh appeared to him at this crucial time (v. 14) and reconfirmed the promise of land that, He said, He would give to Abram's offspring (v. 15).

Abram "lifted up his eyes" also (v. 14), but he saw the whole land as far as he could see in every direction. God repeated His promise to give him and his descendants all the land he saw. This promise was more specific than God's previous promises regarding the seed and the land (12:2, 7). This was God's third revelation to Abram. It contained three specifics.

1. Abram's heir would be *his own seed* (offspring; vv. 15-16).
2. God would give the land to Abram and his descendants *forever* (v. 15).
3. Abram's descendants would be *innumerable* (v. 16).

The figure of "dust" suggests physical seed (v. 16; cf. 2:7). The "stars" figure given later (15:5) suggests heavenly or spiritual seed, in addition to physical seed.

⁴⁷⁹James Monson, *The Land Between*, pp. 163-64.

⁴⁸⁰Haddon Robinson, *Leadership* 3:1 (Winter 1982):104.

⁴⁸¹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 144.

God's encouragement to walk through the land (v. 17) suggested that Abram should claim the promise by treading the land under his feet. In the ancient Near East victorious armies claimed defeated territory by marching through it.

"The divine promise of land and other blessings (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-8) is in the form of a covenant known technically in ancient Near Eastern studies as a 'covenant of grant.' It was made at the initiative of the granter and often with no preconditions or qualifications."⁴⁸²

13:18 Abram later relocated near Hebron where he built another altar and worshipped again (v. 18). Hebron is the highest town in the Promised Land with an elevation of about 3,050 feet. Its site is strategic lying midway between Jerusalem and Beersheba.

Many of the commentators have seen two types of believers in Abram and Lot. One commits himself completely to trusting and obeying God, though not without occasional failures in his faith. The other wants both what God and what the world can give him. These correspond to a spiritual and a carnal believer, a single-minded and a double-minded believer. When Abram gave Lot the choice of where he wanted to live, Abram was giving up any claim to temporal advantages and was trusting God to bless him as God had promised He would. This step of faith led to greater blessing by God (vv. 14-17). Abram's response to this fresh revelation was again worship.

People who truly believe God's promises of provision can be generous with their possessions.

4. Abram's military victory ch. 14

Sometime later a powerful coalition of kings from Mesopotamia invaded Canaan and in the process took Lot captive. Abram retaliated with a surprise attack at night and recovered Lot and the possessions those kings had taken. Upon his return to his home Abram received a blessing from Melchizedek, king of Salem, and received an offer of reward by the king of Sodom, Bera (v. 2). Abram declined to accept the reward because he did not want to tarnish God's promised blessing of him. Abram's realization that victory and possessions come from God alone enabled him to avoid the danger of accepting gifts from the wicked and to wait for God to provide what He had promised. In this chapter we see a much different Abram from the coward who endangered his wife in Egypt (ch. 12).

Abram's war with four kings 14:1-16

A major significance of this literary unit is that it describes two more challenges to God's faithfulness and Abram's faith. So far Abram had to contend with several barriers to

⁴⁸²Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 36, n. 39.

God's fulfilling His promises to him. His wife was barren, he had to leave the land, his life was in danger, and his anticipated heir showed not interest in the Promised Land. Now he became involved in a war and consequently became the target of retaliation by four powerful kings.

14:1-12 The four kings (v. 1) resided in the eastern part of the Fertile Crescent. They sought to dominate the land of Canaan by subjugating the five kings (v. 2) who lived there. They probably wanted to keep the trade routes between Mesopotamia and Egypt open and under their control. It is interesting that people living around Babylon initiated this first war mentioned in the Bible (v. 2).

Scholars have debated the identity of the Rephaim (vv. 5; cf. 15:20; literally "ghosts" or "spirits of the dead"). Some believe they were gods, others that they were the deified dead, and still others the promoters of fertility.⁴⁸³ Most likely they were one of the early tribal groups that inhabited Canaan when Abram entered the land. They appear to have been very powerful, and apparently some of their neighbors regarded them as superhuman before and or after their heyday.⁴⁸⁴

The scene of the battle of the nine kings was the Valley of Siddim (vv. 3, 8). This valley probably lay in the southern "bay" of the modern Dead Sea south of the Lissan Peninsula. The Old Testament calls this body of water the "Salt Sea" because its average 32 percent saline content is about ten times more than the three percent average of the oceans.

14:13-16 Abram could have lost his possessions and his life by getting involved in war with the Mesopotamian kings. He also set himself up as the target for retaliation. Almost everyone in the ancient Near East practiced retaliation, and it is still a major factor in the continuing political turmoil that characterizes the Middle East to this day.⁴⁸⁵ People did not forgive and forget; they harbored resentment for acts committed against their ancestors or themselves for generations and took revenge when they thought they could succeed.

Why was Abram willing to take such risks? He probably thought he could win. His love for Lot may have been the primary factor. He did not think, "He's made his own bed; let him lie in it." Perhaps Abram hoped that Lot had learned his lesson living in Sodom and would return to him. Unfortunately Lot had not learned his lesson but returned to Sodom soon after his release as a prisoner of war. Undoubtedly Abram also had confidence in God's promises to him (12:2-3, 7).

⁴⁸³Conrad L'Heureux, "The Ugaritic and Biblical Rephaim," *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974):265-74.

⁴⁸⁴See *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Rephaim," by T. C. Mitchell.

⁴⁸⁵The "ancient Near East" is a term that applies to the whole eastern Mediterranean world in ancient times. The "Middle East" is a term that refers to the area roughly between Africa, Europe, and Asia in modern times.

"We have here a prelude of the future assault of the worldly power upon the kingdom of God established in Canaan; and the importance of this event to sacred history consists in the fact, that the kings of the valley of Jordan and the surrounding country submitted to the worldly power, whilst Abram, on the contrary, with his home-born servants, smote the conquerors and rescued their booty,—a prophetic sign that in the conflict with the power of the world the seed of Abram would not only not be subdued, but would be able to rescue from destruction those who appealed to it for aid."⁴⁸⁶

Some scholars have suggested that Abram's designation as a Hebrew (v. 13) marked him as a resident alien rather than a semi-nomad. As such he took steps to take possession of the land God had promised him.⁴⁸⁷ He could have been both.⁴⁸⁸ Albright argued that he was a "donkeyman, donkey driver, caravaner."⁴⁸⁹ However most conservative interpreters have concluded that he was a semi-nomadic shepherd.⁴⁹⁰ The term "Hebrew" is primarily an ethnic designation in the Old Testament.⁴⁹¹ Usually people other than Hebrews used it to describe this ethnic group.

The situation that Abraham faced taking his 318 men and going into battle against an alliance of four armies was similar to the one Gideon faced in leading 300 men against 135,000 Midianites (Judg. 7:6; 8:10). The lesson of both passages is similar: God is able to give a trusting and obedient minority victory over ungodly forces that are overwhelmingly superior in numbers.

Abram's meeting with two kings 14:17-24

This section records an important decision Abram had to make after he returned victoriously from his battle with the Mesopotamian kings.

14:17 The "valley of Shaveh" was near Jerusalem (the Salem of verse 18). It may have been the Kidron Valley immediately east of the city or some other valley not far away.

⁴⁸⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 1:202.

⁴⁸⁷See Donald J. Wiseman, "Abraham in History and Tradition. Part I: Abraham the Hebrew," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:534 (April-June 1977):123-30.

⁴⁸⁸See Yochanan Muffs, "Abraham the Noble Warrior: Patriarchal Politics and Laws of War in Ancient Israel," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1982):81-107.

⁴⁸⁹Albright, p. 34.

⁴⁹⁰E.g., Kitchen, *The Bible . . .*, p. 57. Cf. 46:32, 34; 47:3.

⁴⁹¹Hamilton, p. 405.

14:18 "Melchizedek" was probably a title rather than a proper name. It means "King of Righteousness."⁴⁹² However theophoric names were common in the ancient Near East, so his name may have meant "My king is Sedeq" or "Milku is righteous," Sedeq and Milku presumably being the names of gods.⁴⁹³ The names of both the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 2) are compounds of a Hebrew word translated "evil" (cf. 13:13).

Bread and wine were the royal food and drink of the day. Many writers have commented on their typical significance. Many ancient Near Easterners used them in making covenants.⁴⁹⁴ Melchizedek, the first priest mentioned in the Bible, evidently gave a royal banquet in Abram's honor. In view of their characters and geographical proximity, Abram and Melchizedek may have been friends before this meeting. Melchizedek may have been Abram's king to whom the patriarch was paying an expected obligation.⁴⁹⁵

14:19 The God Melchizedek worshipped as a priest was the true God known to him as El Elyon, the possessor of heaven and earth. This title reveals the sovereign power of God. Melchizedek and Abram regarded Abram's recent victory in battle as due to the blessing of El Elyon.

14:20 People practiced tithing as an act of worship commonly in the ancient Near East at this time (cf. 28:22).⁴⁹⁶ It was also a common tax.⁴⁹⁷ However since Melchizedek gave Abram a priestly blessing, it is likely that Abram reciprocated by giving Melchizedek a gift with priestly connotations.⁴⁹⁸ "All" probably refers to all that he took in the battle rather than all that was in Abram's possession (cf. vv. 23-24; Heb. 7:4).

14:21-24 Abram identified El Elyon with Yahweh (v. 22). His willingness to take no spoil from the battle for himself demonstrates Abram's desire that God would receive all the glory for his prosperity. He also appears not to have wanted to be indebted to the wicked king of Sodom. This man may have by his command to Abram been setting him up for demands later (cf. 23:15).

⁴⁹²Cf. Adonizedek ("Lord of Righteousness") in Josh. 10:1, 3.

⁴⁹³Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 316.

⁴⁹⁴Donald J. Wiseman, "Abraham in History and Tradition. Part II: Abraham the Prince," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:535 (July-September 1977):236.

⁴⁹⁵Loren Fisher, "Abraham and His Priest-King," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962):268.

⁴⁹⁶See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:207.

⁴⁹⁷W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, pp. 245-51. This is still true in some modern countries. For example, in England part of every person's taxes goes to maintain the Church of England. Some residents regard this part of their tax as their contribution to the church or their tithe.

⁴⁹⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 316.

"The gifts of the ungodly are often attached to deadly strings."⁴⁹⁹

Generally, the patriarchs believed that God would give them what He had promised without their having to take it from others.⁵⁰⁰ Abram was content with what God had given him.

". . . just as in the previous episode where Abram allowed Lot the pick of the land, so here he allows the surly king of Sodom more than his due."⁵⁰¹

"Christians are really so rich in their own inheritance that it ill becomes them to crave the possessions of others."⁵⁰²

This event is significant because it demonstrates Abram's trust in God to provide what He had promised, which God soon rewarded with another revelation and promise (15:1).

"Even without the explicit warning that 'he who disdains you I shall curse,' the narrative suggests that it is dangerous to despise those through whom God works.

"It is the demonstration of divine support for Abram that is the clearest thrust of this story. . . .

"Within Genesis, however, Melchizedek is primarily an example of a non-Jew who recognizes God's hand at work in Israel . . . They are those who have discovered that in Abram all the families of the earth find blessing."⁵⁰³

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews expounded the typical significance of Melchizedek and the events of this incident in Hebrews 7 (cf. Ps. 110:4).⁵⁰⁴

Confidence that God will preserve and provide for His own as He has promised should encourage believers to decline worldly benefits and wait for God's blessings.

5. The Abrahamic Covenant ch. 15

Abram asked God to strengthen his faith. In response Yahweh promised to give the patriarch innumerable descendants. This led Abram to request some further assurance that God would indeed do what He promised. God graciously obliged him by formalizing the promises and making a covenant. In the giving of the covenant God let Abram know symbolically that enslavement would precede the fulfillment of the promise.

⁴⁹⁹Davis, p. 182.

⁵⁰⁰See note on 48:22.

⁵⁰¹Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 318.

⁵⁰²Bush, 1:237.

⁵⁰³Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 321-22.

⁵⁰⁴A type is a divinely intended illustration of something else that follows, the antitype.

From chapters 12 through 14 issues involving God's promise to Abram concerning land have predominated. However from chapter 15 on tensions arising from the promise of descendants become central in the narrative.

Abram was legitimately concerned about God's provision of the Promised Land as well as his need for an heir. He had declined the gifts of the king of Sodom and had placed himself in danger of retaliation from four powerful Mesopotamian kings. God had proven Himself to be Abram's "shield" (defender) in the battle just passed. Now He promised to be the same in the future and to give Abram great "reward." This was God's fourth revelation to Abram.

"Scene 5 [ch. 15] consists of two divine encounters (15:1-6 and 7-21) involving dialogue between the Lord and Abraham and powerful images symbolizing God's presence and promises. The first occurs at night (15:5) as a vision (15:1) and pertains to the promised seed. The second occurs at sundown (15:12), partially in a deep sleep (15:12), and pertains to the promised land."⁵⁰⁵

15:1 "The word of the LORD came.' This is a phrase typically introducing revelation to a prophet, e.g., 1 Sam 15:10; Hos 1:1; but in Genesis it is found only here and in v 4 of this chapter. Abraham is actually called a prophet in 20:7. It prepares the way for the prophecy of the Egyptian bondage in vv 13-16."⁵⁰⁶

Visions were one of the three primary methods of divine revelation in the Old Testament along with dreams and direct communications (cf. Num. 12:6-8).

"By his bold intervention and rescue of Lot, Abram exposes himself to the endemic plague of that region—wars of retaliation.⁵⁰⁷ This fear of retaliation is the primary reason for the divine oracle of 15.1 which could be translated: 'Stop being afraid, Abram. I am a shield for you, your very great reward.' Yahweh's providential care for Abram is to be seen as preventing the Mesopotamian coalition from returning and settling the score."⁵⁰⁸

The promise of reward (Heb. *shakar*), coming just after Abram's battle with the kings, resembles a royal grant to an officer for faithful military service.⁵⁰⁹ God would compensate Abram for conducting this military campaign even though he had passed up a reward from the king of Sodom.

⁵⁰⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 238.

⁵⁰⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 327.

⁵⁰⁷"See Sarna, [*Understanding Genesis*, pp.] 116, 121, 122."

⁵⁰⁸Helyer, p. 83.

⁵⁰⁹M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, p. 216.

15:2-3 Abram used a new title for God calling Him Master (Adonai) Yahweh. Abram had willingly placed himself under the sovereign leadership of God.

"A childless couple adopts a son, sometimes a slave, to serve them in their lifetime and bury and mourn them when they die. In return for this service they designate the adopted son as the heir presumptive. Should a natural son be born to the couple after such action, this son becomes the chief heir, demoting the adopted son to the penultimate position."⁵¹⁰

15:4 Abram assumed that since he was old and childless and since Lot had not returned to him, the heir God had promised him would be his chief servant, Eliezer.

". . . under Hurrian law a man's heir would be either his natural-born son—a direct heir—or, in the absence of any natural-born son, an indirect heir, who was an outsider adopted for the purpose. In the latter case, the adopted heir was required to attend to the physical needs of his 'parents' during their lifetime."⁵¹¹

God assured Abram that the descendants He had promised would come through a "natural-born son," not an adopted heir (cf. 12:7; 13:15-16).

15:5 To the promise of descendants as innumerable as the dust (physical descendants from the land? cf. 13:16) God added another promise that Abram's seed would be as countless as the stars. This is perhaps a promise of Abram's spiritual children, those who would have faith in God as he did. Abram may not have caught this distinction since he would have more naturally taken the promise as a reference to physical children.

15:6-7 Moses did not reveal exactly what Abram believed for which God reckoned him righteous. In Hebrew the conjunction *waw* with the imperfect tense verb following indicates consecutive action and best translates as "Then." When *waw* occurs with the perfect tense verb following, as we have here, it indicates disjunctive action and could read, "Now Abram had believed . . ." (cf. 1:2). God justified Abram (i.e., declared him righteous) because of his faith, evidently when he left Ur. Abram's normal response to God's words to him was to believe them.

⁵¹⁰Hamilton, p. 420. See also Cyrus H. Gordon, "Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets," *Biblical Archaeologist* 3:1 (February 1940):2-3.

⁵¹¹West, pp. 68-69. See also Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 116, 121-22; Anthony Phillips, "Some Aspects of Family Law in Pre-Exilic Israel," *Vetus Testamentum* 23:3 (1973):360; and Kitchen, *The Bible . . .*, p. 70.

Abram had trusted the person of God previously, but he evidently had not realized that God would give him an heir from his own body (v. 4). Now he accepted this promise of God also (cf. Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23).

"In the middle of this chapter occurs what is perhaps the most important verse in the entire Bible: Genesis 15:6. In it, the doctrine of justification by faith is set forth for the first time. This is the first verse in the Bible explicitly to speak of (1) 'faith,' (2) 'righteousness,' and (3) 'justification.'"⁵¹²

Trust in God's promise is what results in justification in any age. The promises of God (content of faith) vary, but the object of faith does not. It is always God.⁵¹³ Technically Abram trusted in a Person and hoped in a promise. To justify someone means to *declare* that person righteous, not to *make* him or her righteous (cf. Deut. 25:1). Justification expresses a legal verdict.

Moses probably recorded Abram's faith here because it was foundational for making the Abrahamic Covenant. God made this covenant with a man who believed in Him.

James 2:21 suggests that Abram was justified when he offered Isaac (ch. 22). James meant that Abram's work of willingly offering Isaac justified him (i.e., declared him righteous). His work manifested his righteous condition. In Genesis 15 God declared Abram righteous, but in Genesis 22 Abram's works declared (testified) that he was righteous.

"In the sacrifice of Isaac was shown the full meaning of the word (Gen. 15:6) spoken 30 . . . years before in commendation of Abraham's belief in the promise of a child. . . . It was the willing surrender of the child of promise, 'accounting that God was able to raise him up from the dead,' which fully proved his faith."⁵¹⁴

Abram's exodus from his homeland and Israel's exodus from Egypt were two key events in the formation of national Israel.

15:8 Abram requested a sign, a supernatural verification that God would indeed fulfill the distant promise. His request shows that he was taking God seriously.

"Requests for signs were not unusual in Old Testament times. They were not so much to discover God's will as to confirm it."⁵¹⁵

⁵¹²Boice, 2:98.

⁵¹³See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 110-31; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 105-22.

⁵¹⁴Joseph Mayor, *The Epistle of Saint James*, p. 104. Cf. Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, pp. 28-31.

⁵¹⁵Davis, p. 186.

God responded by making a covenant with Abram (vv. 9-12, 17).

"Only after he had been counted righteous by his faith could Abraham enter into God's covenant."⁵¹⁶

"Four rites are mentioned [in the Old Testament] as parts of the covenant making event. They are the setting of a stone or a group of stones, the taking of an oath, the sacrifice of animals, and/or a communal meal."⁵¹⁷

This rite (the sacrifice of animals) normally involved two parties dividing an animal into two equal parts, joining hands, and passing between the two parts (cf. Jer. 34:18-19). On this occasion, however, God alone passed between the parts indicating that Abram had no obligations to fulfill to receive the covenant promises (v. 17).

15:9-10 The animals used were standard types of sacrificial animals and may have represented the nation of Israel, "a kingdom of priests" (Exod. 19:6).

"The use of five different kinds of sacrificial animals on this occasion underlines the solemnity of the occasion."⁵¹⁸

"We suggest that the animal cutting in Gen. 15:9-10, 17 is designated a 'covenant ratification sacrifice' . . . The killing and sectioning of the animals by Abram is the sacrificial *preparatio* for the subsequent divine *ratificatio* of the covenant by Yahweh who in passing between the pieces irrevocably pledges the fulfillment of his covenant promise to the patriarch. The initiative of Yahweh remains in the foreground both in the instruction for the 'covenant ratification sacrifice' (Gen. 15:9-10) and in the act of *b^erit* [covenant] ratification itself (v. 17). . . .

"Gen. 15:7-21 contains covenant-making in which Yahweh binds himself in promise to Abram in the passing through the animals in the act of covenant ratification. Abram had prepared the animals for this ratification act through the 'covenant ratification sacrifice' which involved both killing and sectioning of the victims. Certain basic features of this covenant ratification rite are most closely paralleled only in aspects of the function of animal rites of the extant early second millennium treaty texts."⁵¹⁹

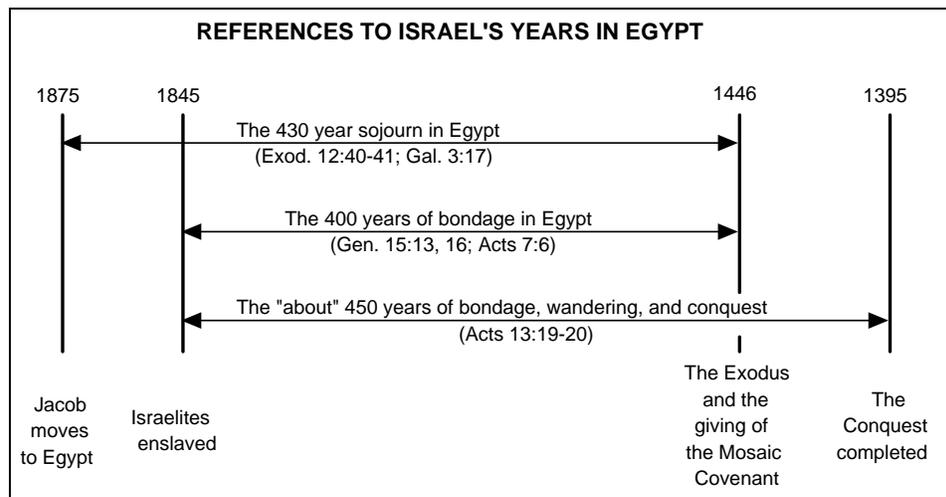
⁵¹⁶Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* . . . , p. 152.

⁵¹⁷Livingston, p. 157.

⁵¹⁸Gordon J. Wenham, "The Symbolism of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15: A Response to G. F. Hasel, *JSOT* 19 (1981):61-78," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (1981):135.

⁵¹⁹Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Meaning of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19 (1981):70.

- 15:11 "The birds of prey are unclean (Lev. 11:13-19; Deut. 14:12-18) and represent foreign nations (Ezek. 17:3, 7; Zech. 5:9), most probably Egypt. . . . Thus Abram driving off the birds of prey from the dismembered pieces portrays him defending his descendants from the attacks of foreign nations. Genesis itself tells of a number of attacks by foreigners against the children of Abraham (e.g. chs. 26, 34) and it already looks forward to the sojourn in Egypt (chs. 37—50 [cf. Exod. 1:11-12]). But in what sense can Abraham's actions be said to protect his offspring? Genesis 22:16-18; 26:5 suggest it was Abraham's faithful obedience to the covenant that guaranteed the blessing of his descendants. . . . Exodus 2:24 and Deuteronomy 9:5 also ground the exodus in the divine promises made to the patriarchs. The bird scene therefore portrays the security of Israel as the consequence of Abraham's piety."⁵²⁰
- 15:12 Abram's terror reflects his reaction to the flame that passed between the parts and to the revelation of the character of God that the flame represented (cf. v. 17).
- 15:13-14 Moses gave more detail regarding the history of the seed here than he had revealed previously (cf. vv. 14, 16). The 400 years of enslavement were evidently from 1845 B.C. to 1446 B.C., the date of the Exodus.



- 15:15 The ancients conceived of death as a time when they would rejoin their departed ancestors. There was evidently little understanding of what lay beyond the grave at this time in history.⁵²¹

⁵²⁰Wenham, "The Symbolism . . .," p. 135.

⁵²¹For a synopsis of Israel's view of life after death, see Bernhard Lang, "Afterlife: Ancient Israel's Changing Vision of the World Beyond," *Bible Review* 4:1 (February 1988):12-23.

- 15:16 The Hebrew word translated "generation" really refers to a lifetime, which at this period in history was about 100 years.⁵²² This seems a better explanation than that four literal generations are in view. The writer mentioned four literal generations in Exodus 6:16-20 and Numbers 26:58-59, but there were quite evidently gaps in those genealogies.⁵²³ "The Amorite" serves as a synecdoche for the ten Canaanite nations listed in verses 19 and 20.
- 15:17 The smoking oven and flaming torch were one. This was an intensely bright, hot flame symbolic of God in His holiness. The flame is a good symbol of God in that it is pure, purges in judgment, and provides light and warmth.⁵²⁴

"This act is . . . a promise that God will be with Abraham's descendants (e.g. 26:3, 24; 28:15; 31:3; 46:4, etc.). Indeed the description of the theophany as a furnace of smoke and 'a torch of fire' invites comparison with the pillar of cloud and fire that was a feature of the wilderness wanderings, and especially with the smoke, fire and torches (Exod. 19:18; 20:18) that marked the law-giving at Sinai. These were visible tokens of God's presence with his people, that he was walking among them and that they were his people (Lev. 26:12).

"In this episode then Abram's experience in a sense foreshadows that of his descendants. He sees them under attack from foreign powers but protected and enjoying the immediate presence of God. Elsewhere in the Abraham cycle, his life prefigures episodes in the history of Israel. Famine drove him to settle in Egypt (12:10; cf. chs. 42—46). He escaped after God had plagued Pharaoh (12:17; cf. Exod. 7—12), enriched by his stay in Egypt (13:2; cf. Exod. 12:35-38) and journeyed by stages (13:3; cf. Exod. 17:1; etc.) back to Canaan. In Genesis 22 Abraham goes on a three-day journey to a mountain, offers a sacrifice in place of his only son, God appears to him and reaffirms his promises. Sinai is of course a three-day journey from Egypt (Exod. 8:27), where Israel's first-born sons had been passed over (Exod. 12). There too sacrifice was offered, God appeared and reaffirmed his promises (Exod. 19—24).

⁵²²See W. F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*, p. 9; and *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, s.v., "dor," by Robert D. Culver, 1:186-87.

⁵²³Kitchen, *Ancient Orient* . . . , p. 54.

⁵²⁴Compare the pillar of cloud and fire that led the Israelites in the wilderness.

"Finally, it may be observed, the interpretation of Gen. 15:9-11, 17, that I am proposing on the basis of other ritual texts in the Pentateuch is congruent with verses 13-16, which explain that Abraham's descendants would be oppressed for 400 years in Egypt before they come out with great possessions. Whether these verses are a later addition to the narrative as is generally held, or integral to it as van Seters asserts . . ., they do confirm that at a very early stage in the history of the tradition this rite was interpreted as a dramatic representation of the divine promises to Abraham. It is not a dramatized curse that would come into play should the covenant be broken, but a solemn and visual reaffirmation of the covenant that is essentially a promise . . ."⁵²⁵

15:18 This was the formal "cutting" of the Abrahamic Covenant. God now formalized His earlier promises (12:1-3, 7) into a suzerainty treaty, similar to a royal land grant, since Abram now understood and believed what God had promised. God as king bound Himself to do something for His servant Abram. The fulfillment of the covenant did not depend on Abram's obedience. It rested entirely on God's faithfulness.⁵²⁶

". . . it is fitting that in many respects the account should foreshadow the making of the covenant at Sinai. The opening statement in 15:7: 'I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Ur of the Chaldeans,' is virtually identical to the opening statement of the Sinai covenant in Exodus 20:2: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' The expression 'Ur of the Chaldeans' refers back to Genesis 11:28, 31 and grounds the present covenant in a past act of divine salvation from 'Babylon,' just as Exodus 20:2 grounds the Sinai covenant in an act of divine salvation from Egypt. The coming of God's presence in the awesome fire and darkness of Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18; 20:18; Dt 4:11) appears to be intentionally reflected in Abraham's pyrotechnic vision (Ge 15:12, 17). In the Lord's words to Abraham (15:13-16) the connection between Abraham's covenant and the Sinai covenant is explicitly made by means of the reference to the four

⁵²⁵Wenham, "The Symbolism . . .," p. 136. Gordon H. Johnston argued that this verse does not picture a covenant-making ritual for a unilateral, wholly unconditional covenant (cf. 17:1-2, 9-14; 18:18-19; 22:16, 18; 26:5). He believed the covenant is unconditional, but it did not become unconditional until chapter 22. See "Torch and Brazier Passing between the Pieces (Gen 15:17): Does It Really Symbolize an Unconditional Covenant?" and "God's Covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15: A Contingently-Unconditional Royal Grant?" papers presented at the 56th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, Tex., 18 November 2004.

⁵²⁶Westermann, "The Promises . . .," p. 690.

hundred years of bondage of Abraham's seed and their subsequent 'exodus' ('and after this they will go out,' v. 14). Such considerations lead to the conclusion that the author intends to draw the reader's attention to the events at Sinai in his depiction of the covenant with Abraham.

"If we ask why the author has sought to bring the picture of Sinai here, the answer lies in the purpose of the book. It is part of the overall strategy of the book to show that what God did at Sinai was part of a larger plan which had already been put into action with the patriarchs. Thus, the exodus and the Sinai covenant serve as reminders not only of God's power and grace but also of God's faithfulness. What he sets out to accomplish with his people, he will carry through to the end."⁵²⁷

Moses revealed the general geographical borders of the Promised Land here for the first time. Some scholars interpret the "river of Egypt" as the Nile.

"The argument is usually based on the fact that the Hebrew word *nahar* is consistently restricted to large rivers. However, the Hebrew is more frequently *nahal* (= Arabic *wady*) instead of the *nahar* of Genesis 15:18 which may have been influenced by the second *nahar* in the text.⁵²⁸ In the Akkadian texts of Sargon II (716 B.C.) it appears as *nahal musar*."⁵²⁹

God later specified the Wadi El 'Arish, "the geographical boundary between Canaan and Egypt,"⁵³⁰ as the exact border (Num. 34:5; Josh. 15:4, 47). That seems to be the river in view here too. The Euphrates River has never yet been Israel's border. These borders coincide with those of the Garden of Eden (cf. 2:10-14).⁵³¹

Many amillennialists take these boundaries as an ideal expressing great blessing and believe God never intended that Abram's seed should extend

⁵²⁷Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 152.

⁵²⁸J. Simons, *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament*, p. 96, sec. 272."

⁵²⁹James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 286; also Esarhaddon's *Arzi(ni)* or *Arsa* = Arish (?), (ibid., p. 290). See Bruce K. Waltke, 'River of Egypt,' *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* 5:121; and J. Dwight Pentecost, *Prophecy for Today*, p. 65. An interesting case for the Nile is made by H. Bar-Deroma in 'The River of Egypt (*Nahal Mizraim*),' *Palestinian Exploration Quarterly* 92 (1960):37-56." Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:552 (October-December 1981):311.

⁵³⁰Charles Pfeiffer and Howard Vos, *Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*, p. 88.

⁵³¹Thus the Garden of Eden may have occupied the same general area as the Promised Land.

this far geographically.⁵³² However such a conclusion is subjective and finds no support in the text.

15:19-21 Here Moses named several of the native tribes then inhabiting the Promised Land. "Canaanites" is both a general name for all these tribes and, as here, the name of one of them. These "Hittites" lived near Hebron (23:10); they are probably not the same Hittites that lived in Anatolia (Asia Minor, modern western Turkey; cf. 10:15).

The Abrahamic Covenant is basic to the premillennial system of theology. This covenant has not yet been fulfilled as God promised it would be. Since God is faithful we believe He will fulfill these promises in the future. Consequently there must be a future for Israel as a nation (cf. Rom. 11). Amillennialists interpret this covenant in a less literal way. The crucial issue is interpretation. If God fulfilled the seed and blessings promises literally, should we not expect that He will also fulfill the land promises literally?⁵³³

The Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants are outgrowths of the Abrahamic Covenant. Each of these expands one major promise of the Abrahamic Covenant: the land, seed, and blessing promises respectively.

Now that God had given Abram the covenant the author proceeded to show how He would fulfill the promises. This is the reason for the selection of material that follows. So far in the story of Abram, Moses stressed the plans and purposes of God culminating in the cutting of the covenant. Now we learn how Abram and his seed would realize these plans and purposes. This involves a revelation of God's ways and man's responsibilities.⁵³⁴

God's people can rely on His promises even if they have to experience suffering and death before they experience them.⁵³⁵

6. The birth of Ishmael ch. 16

Sarai and Abram tried to obtain the heir God had promised them by resorting to a culturally acceptable custom of their day even though it involved a failure to trust God. This fleshly act created serious complications for Abram and his household that included Hagar fleeing into the wilderness. Nevertheless God proved faithful to His promises and responded to Hagar's cries for help. He provided for her needs and promised her many descendants through Ishmael since he was Abram's son.

⁵³²E.g., Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 245.

⁵³³See Daniel C. Lane, "The Meaning and Use of the Old Testament Term for 'Covenant' (*berit*): with Some Implications for Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Toronto, Canada, 20 November 2002.

⁵³⁴See J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 1:54-55.

⁵³⁵See Jeffrey Townsend, "Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:568 (October-December 1985):320-37; and Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Covenant with Abraham and Its Historical Setting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:507 (July-September 1970):241-56.

"The account of Sarah's plan to have a son has not only been connected with the list of nations in chapter 15, but also appears to have been intentionally shaped with reference to the account of the Fall in Genesis 3. Each of the main verbs (*wayyiqtol* forms) and key expressions in 16:2-3 finds a parallel in Genesis 3."⁵³⁶

The writer continued to focus increasing attention on the problem of an heir. Sarai had born Abram no children (v. 1). She therefore suggested a plan to obtain an heir from his own body (15:4). It looked as if everything would work out well until a conflict developed between Sarai and Hagar (v. 4). This conflict grew into a major crisis when Hagar fled the encampment pregnant with Abram's unborn child (v. 6). Yahweh intervened again to resolve the crisis (v. 7). He instructed Hagar to return to Sarai (v. 9). Thus Hagar bore Ishmael in Abram's house, but later God revealed that he would not be the heir.

Sarai and Hagar 16:1-6

Using a woman other than one's wife (v. 2) was a method of providing an heir in the case of a childless marriage apart from adoption.⁵³⁷ Hagar was Sarai's personal servant, not a slave girl. Abram also had at least one personal servant (24:2).

"It was a serious matter for a man to be childless in the ancient world, for it left him without an heir. But it was even more calamitous for a woman: to have a great brood of children was the mark of success as a wife; to have none was ignominious failure. So throughout the ancient East polygamy was resorted to as a means of obviating childlessness. But wealthier wives preferred the practice of surrogate motherhood, whereby they allowed their husbands to 'go in to' . . . their maids, a euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. 6:4; 30:3; 38:8, 9; 39:14). The mistress could then feel that her maid's child was her own and exert some control over it in a way that she could not if her husband simply took a second wife."⁵³⁸

The people in Abram's culture regarded a concubine as a secondary wife with some, but not all, of the rights and privileges of the primary wife.⁵³⁹ In effect Hagar became Abram's concubine.

". . . one Nuzi tablet reads: 'Kelim-ninu has been given in marriage to Shennima. . . . If Kelim-ninu does not bear children, Kelim-ninu shall acquire a woman of the land of Lulu (i.e., a slave girl) as wife for Shennima.'"⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁶Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* . . . , p. 153. See this page for a chart of the parallels. Alluding to the Fall suggests the writer's disapproval of what Sarai did (cf. 3:17).

⁵³⁷Speiser, p. 130.

⁵³⁸Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 7.

⁵³⁹Bush, 1:258.

⁵⁴⁰West, p. 69.

Not only was using a concubine an option, but in Hurrian culture husbands sometimes required that if their wife could not bear children she had to provide a concubine for him.⁵⁴¹

"... any child of the bond-slave would necessarily belong to the mistress, not the mother."⁵⁴²

This custom helps explain why Abram was willing to be a part of Sarai's plan that seems so unusual to us. Abram agreed to his wife's faithless suggestion as Adam had followed Eve's lead. Abram's passivity contrasts with his earlier valiant action to save Lot from his captors (ch. 14). Like Eve, Sarai also blamed someone else for the results of her act, namely, Abram (v. 5).

Did Sarai mean that she would obtain children through Hagar by adopting them as her own or by becoming fertile herself as a result of Hagar's childbearing (v. 2)? Most interpreters have taken the first position, but some have preferred the second.⁵⁴³ The basis of the second view is the not infrequent phenomenon of a woman who has had trouble conceiving becoming pregnant after she has adopted a child.

Though using a woman other than one's wife was a custom of the day it was never God's desire (2:24; Matt. 19:4-5). This episode ended in total disaster for everyone involved. Hagar lost her home, Sarai her maid, and Abram his wife's servant and his child by Hagar.

"A thousand volumes written against polygamy would not lead to a clearer fuller conviction of the evils of that practice than the story under review."⁵⁴⁴

Sarai tried to precipitate the will of God by seizing the initiative from God (cf. 3:17). She and Abram chose fleshly means of obtaining the promised heir rather than waiting for God in faith (cf. 25:21).⁵⁴⁵ They let their culture guide them rather than God.

"It's a shame that she [Sarai] hadn't comprehended the fact that her infertility could be used by the Lord to put her in a place of dependence on Him so that fruit could be born in her life."⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴¹Livingston, p. 152. Cf. Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):245.

⁵⁴²Thomas, p. 147. Cf. J. Cheryl Exum, "The Mothers of Israel: The Patriarchal Narrative from a Feminist Perspective," *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1986):64.

⁵⁴³E.g., Samson Kardimon, "Adoption As a Remedy For Infertility in the Period of the Patriarchs," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 3:2 (April 1958):123-26. See John Van Seters, "The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968):401-8.

⁵⁴⁴Bush, 1:259. See also Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 339.

⁵⁴⁵See George Van Pelt Campbell, "Rushing Ahead of God: An Exposition of Genesis 16:1-16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:651 (July-September 2006):276-91.

⁵⁴⁶Don Anderson, *Abraham: Delay Is Not Denial*, p. 93.

The angel of the LORD and Hagar 16:7-14

"The prophetic description of Ishmael as a 'wild ass of a man' [v. 12] (RSV) is rather intriguing. The animal referred to is the wild and untamable onager, which roams the desert at will. This figure of speech depicts very accurately the freedom-loving Bedouin moving across vast stretches of land."⁵⁴⁷

The Lord named Ishmael (v. 11), whose name means "God hears," and Hagar named the Lord (v. 13) "the One who sees." These two names constitute a major revelation of God: He hears and He sees.⁵⁴⁸

Abram and Sarai's action proved to be a source of much difficulty for everyone involved (cf. Abram's error in going to Egypt, 12:11-13). God, however, took care of and blessed Ishmael even though he was the fruit of Abram's presumption. This is another occasion when Abram did not trust God as he should have (cf. 12:10-20).

"Both Hagar and Mary [the mother of Jesus] stand as examples of women who obediently accepted God's word and thereby brought blessing to descendants too many to count."⁵⁴⁹

Paul wrote that this story contains (not is) an allegory (Gal. 4:24). Hagar represents the Mosaic Covenant, and Ishmael is its fruit (slaves). Sarai is the Abrahamic Covenant, and Isaac is its fruit (free sons). Children of the flesh persecute children of the promise (Gal. 4:29).

Resorting to fleshly means rather than waiting for God to provide what He has promised always creates problems. This story also shows that human failure does not frustrate God's plans ultimately.

"If we have made mistakes which have led us into sin, the primary condition of restoration is complete submission to the will of God, whatever that may involve."⁵⁵⁰

When in great distress, people should pray because God is aware of their needs and will fulfill His promises to them.

7. The sign of circumcision ch. 17

The Lord confirmed His covenant with Abram by commanding him to circumcise all the males in his household. Circumcision thereby became the physical demonstration (sign)

⁵⁴⁷Davis, p. 189. Cf. Jer. 2:24; Hos. 8:9. The prophecy was not an insult. Ishmael would enjoy the freedom his mother sought.

⁵⁴⁸For further development of this theology, see Ross, "Genesis," p. 57. This is the only instance in Scripture of a human being conferring a name on God.

⁵⁴⁹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 13.

⁵⁵⁰Thomas, p. 149.

of the obedient faith of Abram and his descendants.⁵⁵¹ God further encouraged the patriarch's faith by changing Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's to Sarah. This was an added confirmation that God would indeed give them innumerable seed as He had promised.

"This chapter is a watershed in the Abraham story. The promises to him have been unfolded bit by bit, gradually building up and becoming more detailed and precise, until here they are repeated and filled out in a glorious crescendo in a long and elaborate divine speech. From this point in Genesis, divine speeches become rarer and little new content is added to the promises, but the fulfillment of these promises becomes more visible."⁵⁵²

Abram undoubtedly assumed that Ishmael would be the promised heir until God told him that Sarai would bear his heir herself (v. 16). That revelation is the most important feature of this chapter. God gave the name changes and circumcision to confirm the covenant promise of an heir and to strengthen Abram's faith.

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael (16:16) God spoke to Abram again (the fifth revelation; v. 1). God called Himself by a new name: El Shaddai (the Almighty God). This was appropriate in view of the thing God proceeded to reveal to Abram that He would do. It would require supernatural power.

The references to the "covenant" in this chapter have caused some confusion. The Abrahamic Covenant (ch. 15) is in view (vv. 4, 7, 11, 19, 21) but also the outward sign of that covenant that was the covenant of circumcision (vv. 2, 9, 10, 13, 14). Thus Moses used the word "covenant" with two different references here. Whereas the Abrahamic Covenant was unconditional, the covenant of circumcision depended on Abram's obedience (vv. 1-2). God would bless Abram as Abram obeyed God by circumcising his household. This blessing would be in the form of multiplying Abram's descendants "exceedingly," even more than God had already promised.

The rite of circumcision was to be a continuing sign of the Abrahamic Covenant to all of Abram's descendants. God also gave Abram and Sarai the added assurance that they would have a multitude of descendants by changing their names.⁵⁵³

Abram (high or exalted father) — **Abraham** (father of a multitude)
Sarai (my princess [perhaps a reference to her noble descent]) — **Sarah**
 (royal princess [from whom kings would come, v. 16])

⁵⁵¹There are three types of signs in the Old Testament. Some signs were proofs that convinced observers of something (e.g., the Egyptian plagues). Others were certain acts that resembled an announced situation (e.g., acted prophecies). Still others were reminders of something (e.g., the rainbow, circumcision).

⁵⁵²Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 16. Really there are five divine speeches: vv. 1b-2, 4-8, 9-14, 15-16, and 19-21. The third speech is the center of the chiasmic structure of this chapter, which may also be read as two parallel panels, namely, 1-14 and 15-27.

⁵⁵³See note on 1:4.

Abraham's name emphasized the number of his seed. Sarah's evidently stressed the royal nature of their line (vv. 6, 16, 20; cf. 12:2).

"The choice of the word *be fruitful* in verse 6 and *multiply* in verse 2 seems intended to recall the blessing of all humankind in 1:29: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land,' and its reiteration in 9:1: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land.' Thus the covenant with Abraham was the means through which God's original blessing would again be channeled to all humankind."⁵⁵⁴

God wanted Abraham to circumcise his male servants as well as his children. The reason was that the Abrahamic Covenant would affect all who had a relationship with Abraham. Consequently they needed to bear the sign of that covenant. The person who refused circumcision was "cut off" from his people because by refusing it he was repudiating God's promises to Abraham.

"This expression undoubtedly involves a wordplay on *cut*. He that is not himself cut (i.e., circumcised) will be cut off (i.e., ostracized). Here is the choice: be cut or be cut off."⁵⁵⁵

There are two views as to the meaning of being cut off from Israel. Some scholars hold it means excommunication from the covenant community and its benefits.⁵⁵⁶ However the better evidence points to execution sometimes by the Israelites but usually by God in premature death.⁵⁵⁷ The threat of being cut off hung over the Israelite offender as the threat of a terminal disease that might end one's life at any time does today.

The person who refused to participate in circumcision demonstrated his lack of faith in God by his refusal. Thus he broke the covenant of circumcision (v. 14).

Only males underwent circumcision, of course. In the patriarchal society of the ancient Near East people considered that a girl or woman shared the condition of her father if she was single, or her husband if she was married.

Circumcision was a fitting symbol for several reasons.

1. It would have been a frequent reminder to every circumcised male of God's promises involving seed.

⁵⁵⁴Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 157.

⁵⁵⁵Hamilton, p. 473.

⁵⁵⁶J. Morganstern, "The Book of the Covenant, Part III—The Huqqim," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 8-9 (1931-32):1-150; and Anthony Phillips, *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law*, pp. 28-32.

⁵⁵⁷Keil and Delitzsch, 1:224; Hamilton, p. 474; M. Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961):195-201; M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, pp. 241-43; W. Horbury, "Extirpation and excommunication," *Vetus Testamentum* 35 (1985):16-18, 31-34; and Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 25.

2. It involved the cutting off of flesh. The circumcised male was one who repudiated "the flesh" (i.e., the simply physical and natural aspects of life) in favor of trust in Yahweh and His spiritual promises.
3. It resulted in greater cleanliness of life and freedom from the effects of sin (i.e., disease and death).

Circumcision was not a new rite. The priests in Egypt practiced it as did most of the Canaanites, the Arabs, and the Hurrians (Horites), but in Mesopotamia it was not customary. Later the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites practiced it, but the Philistines did not.⁵⁵⁸ By commanding it of Abraham and his household God was giving further evidence that he would bless the patriarch. Circumcision has hygienic value since cancer of the penis has a much higher incidence in uncircumcised males.⁵⁵⁹ Circumcision was a rite of passage to adulthood in these cultures.⁵⁶⁰ Normally it was practiced on young adults (cf. ch. 34). Circumcising infants was something new.

"Designating the eighth day after birth as the day of circumcision is one of the most amazing specifications in the Bible, from a medical standpoint. Why the eighth day?"

"At birth, a baby has nutrients, antibodies, and other substances from his mother's blood, including her blood-clotting factors, one of them being prothrombin. Prothrombin is dependent on vitamin K for its production. Vitamin K is produced by intestinal bacteria, which are not present in a newborn baby. After birth prothrombin decreases so that by the third day it is only 30 percent of normal. Circumcision on the third day could result in a devastating hemorrhage.

"The intestinal bacteria finally start their task of manufacturing vitamin K, and the prothrombin subsequently begins to climb. On day eight, it actually overshoots to 110 percent of normal, leveling off to 100 percent on day nine and remaining there for the rest of a person's healthy life. Therefore the eighth day was the safest of all days for circumcision to be performed. On that one day, a person's clotting factor is at 110 percent, the highest ever, and that is the day God prescribed for the surgical process of circumcision.

"Today vitamin K (Aqua Mephyton) is routinely administered to newborns shortly after their delivery, and this eliminates the clotting problem. However, before the days of vitamin K injections, a 1953 pediatrics textbook recommended that the best day to circumcise a newborn was the eighth day of life.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁸See Davis, p. 192; Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 23-24.

⁵⁵⁹Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September 1990):276.

⁵⁶⁰Kidner, p. 174.

⁵⁶¹L. Holt Jr. and R. McIntosh, *Holt Pediatrics*, pp. 125-26.

"Research indicates that other Middle Eastern cultures practiced circumcision . . . However, the Hebrews were unique in that they practiced infant circumcision, which, though medically risky if not properly performed, is less physically and psychologically traumatic than circumcisions performed at an older age."⁵⁶²

God has not commanded circumcision of the flesh for Christians. Some Christians in the reformed traditions of Protestantism regard baptism as what God requires of us today in place of circumcision. They practice infant baptism believing that this rite brings the infant into the "covenant community" (i.e., the church) and under God's care in a special sense. Some believe baptism saves the infant. Others believe it only makes the infant a recipient of special grace. The Bible is quite clear, however, that baptism is a rite that believers should practice after they trust Christ as their Savior as a testimony to their faith. There are parallels between circumcision and baptism, but God did not intend baptism to replace circumcision. God did command circumcision of the Israelites in the Mosaic Law, but He has not commanded it of Christians. We do not live under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 4:10-13; 6:14-15; 7:1-4; 10:4).

Abraham's laugh (v. 17) seems to have been a joyful response to God's promise.⁵⁶³ Sarah's laugh (18:15) seems to have arisen from a spirit of unbelief. The basis for this distinction is God's response to the two laughs.

The writer's use of the phrase "the very same day" (v. 26) points to a momentous day, one of the most important days in human history (cf. Noah's entry into the ark, 7:13; and the Exodus, Exod. 12:17, 41, 51).

The fifth revelation from God advanced God's promises in five particulars.

1. Part of God's blessing would depend on Abraham's maintaining the covenant of circumcision, though the Abrahamic Covenant as a whole did not depend on this (vv. 1-2).
2. Many nations would come from Abraham (vv. 4-6).
3. The Abrahamic Covenant would be eternal (vv. 7-8).
4. God would be the God of Abraham's descendants in a special relationship (vv. 7-8).
5. Sarah herself would bear the promised heir (v. 16).⁵⁶⁴

"Abraham's experiences should teach us that natural law [barrenness] is no barrier to the purposes and plans for [sic] God."⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶²Fawver and Overstreet, p. 277. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 261, also saw the eighth day as symbolic of completing a cycle of time corresponding to the Creation.

⁵⁶³See Raymond L. Cox, "What Made Abraham Laugh?" *Eternity* (November 1975), pp. 19-20.

⁵⁶⁴This is also the first time God identified the Promised Land as Canaan by name (v. 8).

⁵⁶⁵Davis, p. 193.

"Thus Abraham and Noah are presented as examples of those who have lived in obedience to the covenant and are thus 'blameless' before God, because both obeyed God 'as he commanded them' (17:23; cf. 6:22; 7:5, 9, 16)."⁵⁶⁶

God requires a sanctified life of those who anticipate His promised blessings.

8. Yahweh's visit to Abraham 18:1-15

Chapters 18 and 19 constitute one integrated story, but we shall consider it section by section. Like the Flood story, it has a chiasmic structure this time focusing on the announcement of the destruction of Sodom (19:12-13).⁵⁶⁷ Again there is a mass destruction with only one man and his family escaping. Both stories end with intoxication and shameful treatment by children that has consequences for future generations.⁵⁶⁸

We perceive the Lord's gracious initiative toward Abraham in His visit to eat with the patriarch in his tent. This was a sign of intimate fellowship in Abraham's culture. On the basis of that close relationship God guaranteed the soon arrival of the promised heir. In response to Sarah's laugh of unbelief the Lord declared that nothing would be too difficult for Him.

This chapter and the next may seem at first reading to be extraneous to the purpose of the Abraham narrative, which is to demonstrate God's faithfulness to His promises to the patriarch. Notwithstanding they are not. Chapter 18 contributes the following.

1. It records another revelation (the sixth) in which God identified for the first time when the heir would appear (vv. 10, 14). With this revelation God strengthened Abraham's, and especially Sarah's, faith.
2. It fortifies Moses' emphasis on God's supernatural power at work to fulfill His divine promises (vv. 9-15).
3. As a literary device it provides an interlude in the story line and heightens suspense by prolonging the climax. We anticipate the arrival of the heir with mounting interest.
4. It presents Abraham as an intercessor, one of the roles of the prophets of whom Abraham was one of the first (cf. 20:7).
5. It records God's announcement of judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 16-33), which follows in chapter 19.

"The noon encounter in this chapter and the night scene at Sodom in the next are in every sense a contrast of light and darkness. The former, quietly intimate and full of promise, is crowned by the intercession in which Abraham's faith and love show a new breadth of concern. The second scene is all confusion and ruin, moral and physical, ending in a

⁵⁶⁶Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 160. Blameless does not mean sinless but with integrity, wholeness of relationship (cf. 6:9).

⁵⁶⁷See Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 41, for the chiasm.

⁵⁶⁸See *ibid.*, pp. 43-44, for more parallels.

loveless squalor which is even uglier than the great overthrow of the cities."⁵⁶⁹

"There is also a blatant contrast between how Abraham hosted his visitors (ch. 18) and how the Sodomites hosted the same delegation (ch. 19)."⁵⁷⁰

- 18:1 Abraham was living near Hebron at this time (cf. 13:18).
- 18:2 The "three men" were "the LORD" (the Angel of Yahweh, vv. 13, 17, 20, 33) and the "two angels" (19:1; 18:22) who later visited Lot. If Abraham had previously met the Angel of the Lord it seems likely that he would have recognized Him at once (cf. 17:1, 22). If he had not, Abraham became aware of who this Angel was during this interview (cf. v. 25).
- 18:3-11 Abraham's hospitality reflects oriental custom as practiced in his day and, in some respects, even today in the Middle East. He was behaving more wisely than he realized since he did not yet know that his guests were divine visitors (v. 8). "Where is Sarah?" (v. 9) recalls God's earlier questions about Adam (3:9) and Abel (4:9).
- 18:12 Sarah's laugh sprang from a spirit of unbelief due to long disappointment as is clear from the Lord's response to it (v. 14). Abraham's laugh (17:17) did not draw such a response.
- 18:13 The fact that the Lord knew Sarah had laughed and knew her thoughts demonstrated his supernatural knowledge to Abraham and Sarah. This would have strengthened their faith in what He told them.
- 18:14 The Lord's rhetorical question, one of the great statements of Scripture, reminded the elderly couple of His supernatural power and fortified their faith further (cf. Jer. 32:17, 27).
- 18:15 Sarah evidently denied that she had laughed from fear of the Lord's powers or from fear of offending Him. Again God built confidence in His word. If the Lord could read Sarah's thoughts, could He not also open her womb?

Believers should never doubt God's promises because nothing is impossible for Him.

9. Abraham's intercession for Lot 18:16-33

After God reviewed the reasons for sharing His plans for the destruction of Sodom with Abraham, He told the patriarch that He was about to investigate the wicked condition of that city. This news moved Abraham to ask God to be just in His dealings with the righteous there.

⁵⁶⁹Kidner, p. 131.

⁵⁷⁰Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18—50*, p. 5.

"A rhetorical question in each section—'Is anything too demanding for Yahweh?' [v. 14]; 'Shall not he who judges all the earth give right judgment?' [v. 25]—sounds the major motif of each unit [vv. 1-15 and vv. 16-33]. . . . In both units it is some kind of noise that provokes Yahweh—Sarah's laugh and Sodom's groans."⁵⁷¹

18:16-21 God chose to reveal His intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah to Abraham. He did so because of His plans for Abraham. He wanted to challenge Abraham to act wisely and nobly for justice.

"In this section [vv. 1-21] we have an illustration of fellowship with God and some of its essential features. Fellowship is the crowning purpose of God's revelation (1 John 1:3). There is nothing higher than this, for man's life finds its complete fulfillment in union and communion with God. Notice the following elements:

- "1. *Sacred Intimacy*. . . .
- "2. *Genuine Humility*. . . .
- "3. *Special Revelation*. — Fellowship with God is always associated with the knowledge of His will. Servants do not know their master's purposes, but friends and intimates do. . . .
- "4. *Unique Association*. — The man who is in fellowship with God does not merely know the Divine will, but becomes associated with God in the carrying out of that will. . . ."⁵⁷²

God always thoroughly investigates a situation before passing judgment and sending calamity (v. 21).

"The Lord would not arbitrarily destroy them [the people of Sodom and Gomorah]. As a fair and just judge, He would examine the evidence and then reward their deeds appropriately. The anthropomorphic language veils the ontological reality of God's omniscience, but the Lord seems to have been more concerned in this context with revealing Himself as a fair judge, emphasizing the importance of human responsibility and inviting Abraham to assume the role of an intercessor."⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁷²Thomas, pp. 161-62.

⁵⁷³Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Anatomy of an Anthropomorphism: Does God Discover Facts?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:653 (January-March 2007):9.

18:22-33

This is the first time in Scripture that a man initiated a conversation with God. He prayed for the people of Sodom, not just Lot. Abraham's intercession raises several questions in the minds of thoughtful Bible students. Did Abraham succeed in his intercession since God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? Some interpreters believe he did not because he quit too soon.

"... Abraham ceased asking before God ceased giving."⁵⁷⁴

This conclusion assumes that Abraham's primary purpose was to get God to demonstrate mercy and to spare the cities for the sake of their few righteous inhabitants (v. 24). While this idea was obviously in Abraham's mind, his primary purpose seems rather to have been to secure justice (i.e., deliverance) for the righteous minority in their wicked cities (vv. 23, 24). Secondly, he wanted God to spare the cities. This interpretation finds support in Abraham's appeal to the justice of God rather than to His mercy (v. 25). This appeal was the basis of his intercession. Abraham was jealous for the reputation of Yahweh among his neighbors. If this was his primary purpose, Abraham succeeded in obtaining justice for the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah.

A second question arises from Abraham's method of interceding. Is his haggling with God an example we should follow? Evidently Abraham was not trying to wear God down by pressuring Him. Instead he was seeking clarification from God as to the extent of His mercy. He wanted to find out how merciful God would be in judging these cities.

Why did Abraham stop with 10 righteous people (v. 32)? Probably he thought there would be at least 10 righteous in those two cities. He overestimated righteous Lot's influence over his neighbors.

"Ten is still a community; fewer than ten can be saved individually, as happens in Genesis 19."⁵⁷⁵

Will God spare a city or nation today because of the Christians in it? This passage is helpful in answering this question because in it we can see that a godly minority does play a role in influencing God's judgment. It can delay judgment by promoting godliness. However a godly minority may not prevent God's judgment if "sin is exceedingly grave" (v. 20). God does not always choose to remove the righteous from the wicked before He judges the wicked as He did in Lot's case. Nevertheless the Judge of all the earth does deal justly. We can see this when we take the long view. People alive now have yet to receive their final judgment from the divine Judge.

⁵⁷⁴Ibid., p. 116. See also Chris Wright, "Intercession or Irritation?" *Third Way* 29 (February 1983):18-19.

⁵⁷⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 271.

Abraham's shameless, bold persistence with God illustrates what Jesus had in mind when he taught the importance of these qualities in prayer (e.g., Luke 11:5-10; 18:1-8). Threefold repetition is common in Scripture, but Abraham's doubling of it gives his request even more solemnity and weight.

This chapter illustrates a progression in Abraham's relationship with God that is normal for those who have a relationship with Him.

1. God revealed Himself to Abraham (v. 1).
2. Abraham welcomed God's revelation (vv. 2-3).
3. Fellowship resulted (vv. 4-8). They ate together.
4. This fellowship led to further revelation and greater understanding of God's will (vv. 9-22).
5. Having learned of God's purpose to judge the sinners, Abraham's response was to intercede for those under God's judgment (vv. 23-33).

"It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to pray effectively for lost souls if one is not convinced that lostness will ultimately result in literal, eternal punishment."⁵⁷⁶

The outstanding lesson of this section is probably that since God is a righteous Judge He will not destroy the righteous with the wicked.⁵⁷⁷

10. The destruction of Sodom ch. 19

Chapters 18 and 19 "paint a vivid contrast between the respective patriarchal ancestors, Abraham and Lot, with an obvious moralistic intent (i.e., a demonstration that human initiatives—Lot's choice—always lead to catastrophe)."⁵⁷⁸

"In the development of the story two of the themes in counterpoint with Abraham and the Promise—the theme of Lot, the righteous man without the pilgrim spirit, and of Sodom, the standing example of worldly promise, insecurity (chapter 14) and decay—are now heard out to their conclusion. By a master-stroke of narrative, Abraham, who will outlive all such time-servers, is shown standing at his place of intercession (27), a silent witness of the catastrophe he has striven to avert. It is a superb study of the two aspects of judgment: the cataclysmic, as the cities disappear in brimstone and fire, and the gradual, as Lot and his family reach the last stages of disintegration, breaking up in the very hands of their rescuers."⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁶Davis, p. 199.

⁵⁷⁷See Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1982):119-32; and T. J. Mafico, "The Crucial Question Concerning the Justice of God," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 42 (March 1983):11-16.

⁵⁷⁸Helyer, p. 84.

⁵⁷⁹Kidner, pp. 133-34.

"Lot's move from a tent pitched near Sodom (13:12, 13) to a permanent residence in the city showed his willingness to exist with unbridled wickedness."⁵⁸⁰

The men of Sodom wanted to have homosexual relations with Lot's visitors (v. 5). The Mosaic Law later regarded all homosexual behavior as a capital offense (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; cf. Rom. 1:26-27).⁵⁸¹ Their lack of hospitality contrasts with Abraham's hospitality (18:1-8) and reflects their respective moral states.

Hospitality was more sacred than sexual morality to Lot (v. 8; cf. Judg. 19:23-25). Compromise distorts values. He considered his duty to his guests greater than his duty to his children.

"When a man took in a stranger, he was bound to protect him, even at the expense of the host's life."⁵⁸²

"In order to show that the rescue of Lot was in response to the prayer of Abraham, the narrative reads so that the words of the messengers ["swept away," vv. 15, 17] recall explicitly the words of Abraham's prayer in behalf of the righteous in the previous chapter ["sweep away," 18:23]."⁵⁸³

Probably the burning sodium sulfate that was raining down covered Lot's wife as she lingered behind (v. 26).⁵⁸⁴

All that Lot had gained by living in Sodom burned up like wood, hay, and stubble (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15). The Apostle Peter cited Lot as an example of the Lord's deliverance of the godly from trials that He uses to punish the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:6-10). John called believers not to love the world or the things in the world because they will pass away (1 John 2:15-17).

As in the Flood story, the writer focused the reader's attention on the response of individuals to the judgment rather than on the destruction itself. Here those individuals are Lot's wife and Abraham. The picture of Abraham in verses 27-28 is similar to that of

⁵⁸⁰Davis, p. 200. On the location of Sodom and Gomorrah, see "Cities of the Dead Sea Plain," *Buried History* 18:3 (September 1982), pp. 35-48; and R. Thomas Schaub and Walter E. Rast, "Preliminary Report of the 1981 Expedition to the Dead Sea Plain, Jordan," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 254 (Spring 1984):35-60. The traditional site is the south bay of the Dead Sea. Many scholars still support this location including David Howard Jr., "Sodom and Gomorrah Revisited," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27:4 (December 1984):385-400.

⁵⁸¹For a refutation of denials of this view, see P. Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality and the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:559 (July-September 1983):259-66. On the modern resurgence of homosexuality and its connection with ancient religious paganism, see Peter Jones, "Androgyny: The Pagan Sexual Ideal," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:3 (September 2000):443-69.

⁵⁸²Davis, p. 201. See Desmond Alexander, "Lot's Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104:2 (June 1985):289-91.

⁵⁸³Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 170.

⁵⁸⁴Kidner, p. 135. See Deborah Aufenson-Vance, "Lot's Wife Remembers," *Adventist Review* 163:8 (Feb. 20, 1986), p. 5.

Moses interceding for Israel in the battle with the Amalekites (Exod. 17:11-12).⁵⁸⁵ Lot's prayer concerning Zoar (vv. 18-20) contrasts with Abraham's for Sodom (18:23-32).

"The substitution of Abraham for Lot in this sentence ["God remembered Abraham," v. 29; cf. 8:1] makes an important theological point. Lot was not saved on his own merits but through Abraham's intercession."⁵⁸⁶

Moses evidently included the account of Lot's incest (vv. 30-38) for at least two purposes.

1. It gives the origin of the Moabite and Ammonite nations that played major roles as inveterate enemies in the history of Israel. Moab sounds like the words translated "from the father," and Ammon means "son of my kin."

"His legacy, Moab and Ammon (37f.), was destined to provide the worst carnal seduction in the history of Israel (that of Baal-Peor, Nu. 25) and the cruelest religious perversion (that of Molech, Lv. 18:21)."⁵⁸⁷

2. It illustrates the degrading effect that living in Sodom had on Lot's daughters.⁵⁸⁸ His older daughter was so desperate to marry that she exaggerated the effects of the recent catastrophe (v. 31).

"Lot was able to take his daughters out of Sodom, but he was not able to take . . . Sodom out of his daughters."⁵⁸⁹

"Throughout the ancient Near East, incest between father and daughter was regarded as wrong, and OT law punishes more remote forms of incest with death (Lev 20:12). . . . The fact that his daughters had to make him drunk shows that they were consciously flouting normal conventions. Because of his readers' moral assumptions, the narrator did not feel it necessary to excoriate Lot's daughters' behavior. The facts spoke for themselves."⁵⁹⁰

"The story of Lot and his family should provide a sobering reminder that all of our decisions are significant, even that of where we live. Our moral environment significantly influences our lives. For this and many other reasons the New Testament constantly implores the believer to fellowship with those of like precious faith."⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁵Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 173.

⁵⁸⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 59. Abraham rescued Lot twice: from the Mesopotamian kings (ch. 14) and from Sodom.

⁵⁸⁷Kidner, p. 136. See also Henry O. Thompson, "The Biblical Ammonites," *Bible and Spade* 11:1 (Winter 1982):1-14.

⁵⁸⁸The writer censured Lot's daughters by not naming them (cf. Ruth 4:1).

⁵⁸⁹Davis, p. 206.

⁵⁹⁰Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 61-62.

⁵⁹¹Davis, p. 207.

"There are lives recorded in the Bible which have well been called beacons. There are men like Balaam, Saul, and Solomon, who started well, with every possible advantage, and then closed their careers in failure and disaster. Such a life was that of Lot. . . . There is scarcely a life recorded in Scripture which is fuller of serious and solemn instructions for every believer."⁵⁹²

"The impact of the unit focuses more directly on a characterization of the father. The one who offered his daughters for the sexual gratification of his wicked neighbors now becomes the object of his daughters' incestuous relationship To be seduced by one's own daughters into an incestuous relationship with pregnancy following is bad enough. Not to know that the seduction had occurred is worse. To fall prey to the whole plot a second time is worse than ever."⁵⁹³

"In tragic irony, a drunk Lot carried out the very act which he himself had suggested to the men of Sodom (19:8)—he lay with his own daughters.

"The account is remarkably similar to the story of the last days of Noah after his rescue from the Flood (9:20-27). There, as here, the patriarch became drunk with wine and uncovered himself in the presence of his children. In both narratives, the act had grave consequences. Thus at the close of the two great narratives of divine judgment, the Flood and the destruction of Sodom, those who were saved from God's wrath subsequently fell into a form of sin reminiscent of those who died in the judgment. This is a common theme in the prophetic literature (e.g., Isa 56—66; Mal 1)."⁵⁹⁴

From 2 Peter 2:6-9 we know that Lot was a righteous man. Yet he chose to live as, what the New Testament calls, a "carnal" believer (1 Cor. 3:3). First, he lifted up his eyes and saw Sodom (13:10). Then he chose for himself (13:11). Then he moved his tent as far as Sodom (13:12). Then he sat in the gate of Sodom as one of its judges (19:1, 9). Then he hesitated as Sodom's destruction loomed (19:16). Finally he ended up committing incest with his daughters in a cave (19:30-38). How far it is possible for a believer to depart from God's will when we keep making carnal decisions!

The major revelation of this chapter is that it is foolish for a believer to become attached to the things of this world. They will corrupt him, and God will destroy them swiftly and suddenly.

11. Abraham's sojourn at Gerar ch. 20

"The stories about the jeopardy of the ancestress in pagan kings' harems form an inner frame around the Abraham cycle before the transition to the

⁵⁹²Thomas, p. 171.

⁵⁹³George W. Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, p. 147.

⁵⁹⁴Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 174.

next cycle in 22:20—25:11. After Abraham's initial call to the Promised Land to become a great nation, he immediately jeopardizes Sarah in Pharaoh's harem. Now, immediately before the birth of the promised seed, he jeopardizes the matriarch in Abimelech's harem."⁵⁹⁵

The writer composed chapter 20 as another chiasm with the focal point being Abimelech warning his servants (v. 8). Two dialogues dominate the story: the one between God and Abimelech (vv. 3-7) and the one between Abimelech and Abraham (vv. 9-13).

"The focus of the narrative of chapters 20 and 21 is on the relationship between Abraham and the nations. Abraham's role is that of a prophetic intercessor, as in the promise 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (12:3). He prayed for the Philistines (20:7), and God healed them (v. 17). In the narrative Abimelech plays the role of a 'righteous Gentile' with whom Abraham could live in peace and blessing. There is, then, an implied contrast in the narratives between chapters 19 (Lot, the one who pictures the mixed multitude) and 20 (Abimelech, the righteous sojourner)."⁵⁹⁶

Abraham lied about his relationship with Sarah again (cf. ch. 12). Abimelech took her into his harem as a consequence of the patriarch's deception. Nevertheless God intervened to preserve Sarah's purity. He warned Abimelech to restore Sarah to her husband, to make restitution to Abraham, and to ask Abraham the prophet to intercede with God for him.

This chapter records another crisis in the story of God's providing an heir for Abraham.

"Apparently, shortly after the announcement of a birth one year hence, Sarah is again taken into another man's harem. The reader is to infer that if there is an heir, he is in danger of being reckoned as Abimelech's not Abraham's. But Yahweh intervenes once again and preserves Sarah (20.6b) and restores her to Abraham."⁵⁹⁷

". . . the episode is chiefly one of suspense: on the brink of Isaac's birth-story here is the very Promise put in jeopardy, traded away for personal safety. If it is ever to be fulfilled, it will owe very little to man. Morally as well as physically, it will clearly have to be achieved by the grace of God."⁵⁹⁸

Abraham naturally moved frequently since he had to find pasture for his flocks and herds (v. 1). He lived a semi-nomadic life.

⁵⁹⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 284.

⁵⁹⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 161.

⁵⁹⁷Helyer, p. 84.

⁵⁹⁸Kidner, p. 137.

"... his house and family remained at Gerar while he was down in Sinai
..."⁵⁹⁹

"Abimelech" was a title rather than a proper name (cf. 26:1; Judg. 8:31; 2 Sam. 11:21; Ps. 34 title). It meant "royal father" or "the king [Milku, a Canaanite deity mentioned in the Amarna letters] is my father."⁶⁰⁰

Dreams were one of the primary means by which God revealed Himself to individuals in the Old Testament along with visions and personal encounters (cf. 15:1; Num. 12:6-8). Adultery commonly drew the death penalty in the ancient Near East, which the Mosaic Code later reflected (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Abimelech claimed to head a blameless nation (v. 4), so we expect God to be gracious since Abraham had prayed that the Lord would not destroy the righteous with the wicked (18:23-32). God was gracious with Abimelech and his people (v. 6; cf. v. 17).

Moses identified Abraham here (v. 7) as a "prophet." This is the first explicit reference to a prophet in the Old Testament. Prophets received direct revelations from God, spoke to others for God, and praised God (1 Chron. 25:1). Here the role of the prophet includes that of intercessor, as it does elsewhere in Scripture.

"In king Abimelech we meet with a totally different character from that of Pharaoh [ch. 12]. We see in him a heathen imbued with a moral consciousness of right, and open to receive divine revelation, of which there is not the slightest trace in the king of Egypt."⁶⁰¹

"Like the sailors and the king of Nineveh in the book of Jonah (1:16; 3:6-9), the Philistines responded quickly and decisively to God's warning. Like Jonah, however, Abraham in this narrative was a reluctant prophet."⁶⁰²

Fear for his safety evidently led Abraham to act as he did even though his experience with Pharaoh in Egypt had been unsuccessful. Even the repeated promises of God did not drive fear of potential danger from Abraham's heart. God used a pagan king to rebuke the righteous prophet, who had boldly pleaded for Sodom, when Abraham's faith failed.

This incident shows God's faithfulness to Abraham compared to Abraham's unfaithfulness to God (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13). God's chosen ones cannot destroy His ultimate plans for them by failing. Abraham learned that Yahweh can maintain His covenant and fulfill His promises in spite of the opposition and interference of influential and powerful individuals.

⁵⁹⁹Albright, p. 48.

⁶⁰⁰Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 70. For an explanation of Abraham's behavior here, see my notes on 12:10-20. D. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*, p. 30, noted several parallels between the three similar events in 12:10-20; 20:1-18; and 26:1, 7-17.

⁶⁰¹Keil and Delitzsch, 1:242.

⁶⁰²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 175.

God requires His people to maintain purity in marriage and to look to Him to provide what He has promised.

12. The birth of Isaac 21:1-21

God proved faithful to His promise by providing Isaac. Abraham and Sarah responded with obedience and praise. Ishmael, however, became a threat to Abraham's heir and, consequently, his father sent him away into the wilderness where God continued to provide for him and his mother.

God's provision and Abraham and Sarah's response 21:1-7

The emphasis in this brief section is on the faithfulness and power of God in keeping His promise and providing an heir miraculously through Sarah (17:16; 18:14). Note the threefold repetition of "as He had said," "as He had promised," and "of which God had spoken" (vv. 1-2). The tension of anticipation finally subsides, but only temporarily.

God "visited" Sarah (v. 1, NIV). The Hebrew word translated "visited" (*paqad*) also appears when God intervened to save the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (50:24-25; Exod. 4:31) and when He ended a famine (Ruth 1:6). It also occurs when He made Hannah conceive (1 Sam. 2:21) and when He brought the Jewish exiles home from Babylonian captivity (Jer. 29:10). Thus its presence here highlights the major significance of Isaac's birth.

Abraham's obedience in naming his son "Isaac" (17:19) and circumcising him on the eighth day (17:12) was an expression of worship.

Isaac's name ("laughter") was appropriate for two reasons.

1. Isaac would be a source of joy to his parents as the fulfillment of God's promised seed.
2. Both Abraham and Sarah had laughed in amazement and unbelief respectively when told that God had chosen to bless them by giving them a son so late in life (17:17; 18:12).⁶⁰³

The expulsion of Ishmael and God's care of him and Hagar 21:8-21

All was not well in Abraham's household. Ishmael was a potential rival to Isaac's inheritance. This section records another crisis in the story of Abraham's heir.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰³On the alternate reading of verses 6-7 as "God has made a joke of me . . . laugh at me . . .," see Isaac Rabinowitz, "Sarah's Wish (Gen. XXI 6-7)," *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (July 1979):362-63. This reading has not won support from most commentators.

⁶⁰⁴Walke, *Genesis*, p. 292, pointed out six parallels between Hagar and Ishmael's trek and Abraham and Isaac's (ch. 22).

Normally the son of a concubine became the heir of his mother but not of his father (cf. Judg. 9:1-3). Now that Abraham had a son by his wife, Sarah did not want Ishmael to share Isaac's inheritance. The Hebrew word translated "mocking" (v. 9) comes from the same root as Isaac's name and means "laughing." However this participle is in the intensive form indicating that Ishmael was not simply laughing but ridiculing Isaac (cf. Gal. 4:29).⁶⁰⁵ Abraham understandably felt distressed by this situation since he loved Ishmael as well as Isaac (cf. 17:18). God appeared to him again (the seventh revelation) to assure Abraham that Sarah's desire was in harmony with His will (cf. 17:19-21). He encouraged Abraham to divorce Hagar.

"But how could God ask Abraham to do evil if divorce is always a sin? The answer must be that divorce in this case is either not a sin or else is the lesser of two evils."⁶⁰⁶

"The key to Sarah's demand lies in a clause in the laws of Lipit-Ishtar where it is stipulated that the father may grant freedom to the slave woman and the children she has borne him, in which case they forfeit their share of the paternal property."⁶⁰⁷

The focus of this revelation is a clarification of God's purposes for each of the two sons. God would bless Abraham through Ishmael as well as through Isaac.

"As Cain suffered both banishment from the divine and protection by the divine, so Ishmael is both loser and winner, cut off from what should be his but promised a significant lineage."⁶⁰⁸

The concluding description of Ishmael's experiences (vv. 14-21) provides information essential to understanding and appreciating later references to him and his descendants in the text. Ishmael became the father of 12 sons (25:13-16) as Jacob did. From his sons came the Arab nations that have ever since been the chief antagonists of the Israelites.⁶⁰⁹ Hagar chose a wife for her son from her homeland, Egypt.

"In this respect she does not display the wisdom used by Abraham in choosing, as he did, a god-fearing wife for his son."⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁵Ishmael disdained Isaac as Hagar had despised Sarai (16:4).

⁶⁰⁶Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4 (December 1997):535. For other instances where God apparently commanded divorce, see Deut. 21:10-14 and Ezra 9—10. Since God makes the rules, He can also alter them according to His sovereign will.

⁶⁰⁷Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 147. The laws of Lipit-Ishtar were laws that governed life in the ancient Near East and that antedated the Mosaic Law.

⁶⁰⁸Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 81.

⁶⁰⁹The term "Arab" (someone from Arabia) came into use for the first time in the ninth century B.C. according to Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 156.

⁶¹⁰Leupold, 2:609.

God not only makes promises but also provision. His provision of what He has promised results in great joy and should lead to separation from whatever might hinder His program of blessing.⁶¹¹

13. Abimelech's treaty with Abraham 21:22-34

"This scene occurs at the same time as the events of Scene 6 [21:1-21] but focuses on different characters and tensions. This second conflict with Abimelech creates a bracket around the Isaac birth narrative. Whereas the first conflict, Scene 5 (20:1-18), concerned jeopardy of the seed, the second conflict, Scene 7 (21:22-34), concerns jeopardy of the land (i.e., well rights)."⁶¹²

God's blessing of Abraham resulted in his material prosperity. In response to Abimelech's initiative Abraham agreed to make a covenant of peaceful coexistence. This treaty enabled Abraham to serve and worship God freely in the Promised Land.

The writer may have included this incident in the text partially because it records the testimony of a Gentile king to God's faithfulness (v. 22) and Abraham's strong testimony to God's faithfulness (vv. 32-33). It also sets the stage for Isaac's dealings with Abimelech (ch. 26).

Since Abraham had become a powerful individual in the land by God's blessing, Abimelech initiated a treaty with him for his own protection. This was evidently the same Abimelech that Abraham had dealt with previously (ch. 20). They made a parity covenant (i.e., between equals, vv. 31-32). This was a remarkable admission of Abraham's standing and blessing by God and an expression of Abimelech's confidence in the future existence of the patriarch's family.

The birth of Isaac seems to have produced a much stronger faith in Abraham (cf. v. 14). Note his immediate response to God's instructions to him from then on (cf. 22:3).

"Phicol" (v. 22) seems to have been a title rather than a proper name, probably of Anatolian origin.⁶¹³

Wells were extremely important in the life of semi-nomads like Abraham (v. 25).⁶¹⁴

Beersheba, one of the more important sites throughout Old Testament times, meaning "oath of seven" or "oath-well," became Abraham's possession with the payment of seven ewe lambs (v. 28; cf. 26:33).⁶¹⁵

⁶¹¹See Paul's use of this account in Galatians 4:21-31.

⁶¹²Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 298.

⁶¹³On the origin of Phicol, Abimelech's army commander, see J. D. Ray, "Two Etymologies: Ziklag and Phicol," *Vetus Testamentum* 36:3 (July 1986):358-59; and Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 91-92. Cf. 26:26.

⁶¹⁴See Clark Youngblood, "Wells," *Biblical Illustrator* (Fall 1986), pp. 41-49.

⁶¹⁵See William G. Dever, "Beersheba," *Biblical Illustrator* (Spring 1983), pp. 56-62.

Critics of the historicity of the patriarchal narratives have pointed out references to the Philistines in Genesis (vv. 32, 34; 26:1) as evidence that the Bible contains errors. It is common knowledge that the Philistines did not invade Palestine until about 1200 B.C. whereas Abraham evidently lived about 800 years earlier. One explanation is that since the Philistines of Genesis were peaceful and those of Judges and later warlike perhaps the same name describes an earlier group of people. They may have resembled the later thirteenth-century Philistines who also emigrated from the Aegean area into Palestine.⁶¹⁶ On the other hand perhaps the Philistines of 2000 B.C. were Minoan and peaceful whereas those of 1200 were Mycenaean and warlike.⁶¹⁷

"I suggest that the Philistines of Genesis represent the first wave of Sea Peoples from the Aegean, and that the later Philistines represent the last wave (cf. 1200 B.C.)."⁶¹⁸

By planting a tree Abraham indicated his determination to stay in that region. Tamarisk trees (v. 33) were long-lived and evergreen. This tree was an appropriate symbol of the enduring grace of the faithful God whom Abraham recognized as "the Everlasting God" (El Olam). Abraham now owned a small part of the land God had promised him.

"By granting Abraham rights to a well, Abimelek had made it possible for Abraham to live there permanently and had acknowledged his legal right at least to water. In other words, after so many delays the promises of land and descendants at last seem on their way to fulfillment."⁶¹⁹

In contrast to Abraham's fear of Abimelech (ch. 20) we now see him boldly standing up to this powerful king. His changed attitude evidently resulted from God's grace in blessing the patriarch as He had promised.

"The reader is forced to ask why the author constantly draws attention to the fact that Abraham was dwelling with the Philistines during this time [cf. v. 34]. The purpose of such reminders may be to portray Abraham as one who had yet to experience the complete fulfillment of God's promises."⁶²⁰

Peaceful interpersonal relationships with those who acknowledge God enable the believer to proclaim his or her faith freely.

14. The sacrifice of Isaac 22:1-19

In obedience to God's command Abraham took his promised heir to Moriah to sacrifice him to the Lord. Because Abraham was willing to slay his uniquely begotten son God restrained him from killing Isaac and promised to bless him further for his obedience. Abraham memorialized the place as "the Lord will provide."

⁶¹⁶Kitchen, *Ancient Orient . . .*, p. 80; Edward E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament*, pp. 94-95.

⁶¹⁷Barker, p. 134. See also Vassos Karageorghis, "Exploring Philistine Origins on the Island of Cyprus," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10:2 (March-April 1984):16-28.

⁶¹⁸Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 94.

⁶¹⁹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 94.

⁶²⁰Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 177.

God called on Abraham to make four great sacrifices: his country and kindred, Lot, Ishmael, and Isaac. Each sacrifice involved something naturally dear to Abraham, but each resulted in greater blessings from God.

This incident also demonstrates the strong confidence that Abraham had in God at this time. He believed God was even able to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19). This is why he was willing to slay him.

"With this chapter we reach the climax of the faith life of Abraham—the supreme test and the supreme victory."⁶²¹

"The seventh crisis [I believe it is the eleventh] comes at a point in the narrative when we least expect it and is without question the greatest crisis of all. After all obstacles have seemingly been surmounted and all potential rivals eliminated, God now asks for Abraham's only son whom he loves. The gracious intervention of God and the reaffirmation of the basic promise of 12.1-3 in 22.15-18 would seem to conclude the Abraham cycle at the moment when faith triumphs over the greatest obstacle of all, death."⁶²²

22:1-8 This incident took place some time after the events recorded in the chapters immediately preceding this one, evidently several years later.

God's revelation to Abraham (His eighth recorded in Scripture) came to test Abraham's faith (i.e., to prove its character and strength; cf. James 2:21-23).

"Life is a succession of tests, for character is only possible through discipline."⁶²³

God was testing Abraham's love for Himself as well as his faith (v. 2). Such testing (Heb. *nsh*) shows what someone is really like, and it usually involves difficulty or hardship (cf. Exod. 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2, 16; 13:3; Judg. 2:22; 3:1, 4; 1 Kings 10:1; Dan. 1:12, 14).

"This scene presents the radical nature of true faith: tremendous demands and incredible blessings."⁶²⁴

"The . . . best approach to the passage is that God commanded an actual human sacrifice and Abraham intended to obey Him fully."⁶²⁵

⁶²¹Leupold, 2:616. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 99, 112. This writer also noted parallels between chapters 21 and 22 on pp. 99-100.

⁶²²Helyer, pp. 84-85.

⁶²³Thomas, p. 195.

⁶²⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 301.

⁶²⁵Davis, p. 217.

The land of Moriah was the mountainous country around Jerusalem. It stood about 45 miles north of Beersheba. On these mountains God later appeared to David who built an altar to the Lord (2 Sam. 24:16-25). Here also Solomon built his temple (2 Chron. 3:1) and Jesus Christ died. A mountain was a suitable place for Abraham to meet God (cf. v. 14).

JERUSALEM'S TEMPLE MOUNT⁶²⁶

- It occupies only 140 dunams (35 acres), yet this trapezoid-shaped walled area, hovering over the Old City of Jerusalem, is seldom out of the news. The Mount has been the site of frequent conflicts.
- What is so important about the Temple Mount that it arouses such raging passions among Jew and Moslem alike? In Hebrew it is known as Har HaBayet (Mountain of the House) and in Arabic, Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary). Within the area of the Temple Mount there are about 100 structures from various periods—great works of art and craftsmanship including open-domed Moslem prayer spots, arched porticos, Moslem religious schools, minarets, and fountains.
- Here also is the magnificent Dome of the Rock, the central structure, which was begun by the Ummayyad Caliph, Abd-al-Malik in 684 C.E., and completed in 1033. With the bloody conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, the Dome of the Rock was converted into a church and only re-converted into a mosque after Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem in 1187. With its 45,000 ornamental tiles and 8 graceful arches at the top of the steps leading to the mosque, some observers consider it to be one of the most beautiful buildings in the world.
- The Temple Mount has a very special status and enormous importance to Jews because it was the site of the Temple which stood at its center. Jerusalem, the Holy City, is regarded as the equivalent of the "camp of Israel" that surrounded the sanctuary in the wilderness; and the Temple Mount represents "the camp of the Divine Presence" (Sif. Naso 1:Zev 116b).
- Its most sacred section was the Holy of Holies. Only the highest priest was allowed to enter it, and then only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, for the service Isaiah (2:3) tells us that [*sic*] "it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it . . . For out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."
- For Moslems, the Temple Mount also has great sanctity. They have three mosques to which special holiness is attached: the Ka'ba in Mecca, the Mosque of Muhammad in Medina, and the Temple Mount, their third holiest site in Islam. The adoration of the site is based on the first verse of Sura 17 of the Koran, which describes the prophet's Night Journey. They believe that when Muhammad was sleeping near the Ka'ba, the angel Gabriel brought him to a winged creature. Together they rose to heaven and met Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Some Moslems believe that Muhammad made the journey while awake and actually traversed the ground of the Temple Mount.

⁶²⁶Reprinted from *From Mt. Zion* 3:4 (1983):2.

- Because of the special nature of the Temple Mount, it will continue to inflame passions—according to religious Jews until such time as the Messiah comes. Then, according to Jewish belief, He will reign over the restored kingdom of Israel to which all Jews of the Exile will return. It is believed that the foundation of the Messiah's throne will be justice and He will be charismatically endowed to dispense justice both to Israel and its neighboring nations.

Verses 1 and 2 relate another call God gave Abraham that parallels the one in 12:1-3 where God told him to leave where he was and go to another land.

"The repetition of these motifs forms an *inclusio* in the narrative structure of the Abrahamic narrative, pointing out the complete cycle in the patriarch's experience. The allusion to the former call would also have prompted obedience to the present one, in many ways a more difficult journey in God's direction."⁶²⁷

The Canaanites practiced human sacrifice in the worship of their gods. Consequently the Lord was not asking Abraham to make any greater sacrifices to Him, the true God, than his pagan neighbors were willing to make to their false gods.

"The demand [to sacrifice Isaac] was indeed only made to prove that Abraham was not behind the heathen in the self-denying surrender of his dearest to his God, and that when the demand had been complied with in spirit, the external fulfillment might be rejected."⁶²⁸

The words used to describe Isaac in this chapter, as well as what Moses said of him, indicate that he was probably a young man at this time (v. 6). Josephus said he was 25 years old.⁶²⁹

"There are indications to suggest that the meaning of *Abba* in Mark 14:36 is to be found in the light of its whole context and Genesis 22. Jesus' final trial in Gethsemane appears to be modelled on the supreme trial of Abraham and Isaac. Despite his horror and anguish before the prospect of an imminent sacrificial death, Isaac calls to Abraham his *Abba* and, as a faithful son, obeys the voice of God speaking through his father. Parallel to this, Jesus says *Abba* to God in the same way that Isaac does to Abraham.

⁶²⁷Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 394.

⁶²⁸Delitzsch, 2:91.

⁶²⁹Josephus, 1:13:43.

In this context, *Abba* has the meaning of 'father' in the sense of a relationship to a devoted and obedient son. In Jesus' supreme hour of trial, it is his trust and obedience to God as *Abba* that carries him through, even to the cross. This meaning of *Abba* may prompt further study of the significance of *son* in other NT texts to discover whether the obediencial aspect may be more prominent than has been suspected. The father-son relationship in Genesis 22 may be a far-reaching New Testament model of that between Jesus and God."⁶³⁰

Abraham referred to the sacrifice he would offer, supposedly Isaac, but really God's substitute for Isaac, as "the lamb." This statement (v. 8), of course, proved prophetic of Jesus Christ as well.

22:9-19 Isaac demonstrated his own faith clearly in this incident. He must have known what his father intended to do to him yet he submitted willingly (v. 9).

"If Abraham displays faith that obeys, then Isaac displays faith that cooperates. If Isaac was strong and big enough to carry wood for a sacrifice, maybe he was strong and big enough to resist or subdue his father."⁶³¹

"The sacrifice was already accomplished in his [Abraham's] heart, and he had fully satisfied the requirements of God."⁶³²

"The test, instead of breaking him, brings him to the summit of his lifelong walk with God."⁶³³

Abraham gained a greater appreciation of God as the One who will provide or look out for him (Yahweh-jireh, lit. "the Lord sees") as a result of this incident (v. 14). Also, the Lord confirmed His knowledge of Abraham (v. 12; cf. 18:21; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3).

"The story reaches its climax when Abraham demonstrated his loyalty (22:12, 15-18) by obeying God's command (cf. 26:5). God then elevated the patriarch to the status of a favored vassal who now possessed a ratified promise, comparable to the royal grants attested in the ancient Near

⁶³⁰Joseph A. Grassi, "Abba, Father (Mark 14:36): Another Approach," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50:3 (September 1982):455.

⁶³¹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 110.

⁶³²Keil and Delitzsch, 1:250.

⁶³³Kidner, pp. 142-43. See Donald Campbell, "Passing the Test," *Kindred Spirit* 9:2 (Summer 1985):9-10.

East. God contextualized His self-revelation to Abraham (and to the readers of the narrative) within the relational, metaphorical framework of a covenant lord. Thus one should not be surprised to hear Him speak in ways that reflect the relational role He assumed within this metaphorical framework."⁶³⁴

Abraham's sacrifice of the ram (v. 13), like Noah's sacrifice after he left the ark (8:18—9:17), expressed thanks and devotion to God and anticipated His benevolence toward future generations.⁶³⁵ God appeared again to Abraham (the ninth revelation) at the end of His test (v. 15). God swore by Himself to confirm His promises to Abraham (v. 16). God so swore only here in His dealings with the patriarchs. Moses referred to this oath later in Israel's history (24:7; 26:3; 50:24; Exod. 13:5, 11; 33:1; et al.).

". . . the main point of Genesis 22:9-14 is not the doctrine of the Atonement. It is portraying an obedient servant worshipping God in faith at great cost, and in the end receiving God's provision."⁶³⁶

One writer suggested that 22:15-18 really ". . . describes the establishment of the covenant of circumcision first mentioned in Genesis 17."⁶³⁷ However the lack of reference to circumcision in the immediate context makes this interpretation tenuous.

For the first and last time in Genesis, the Lord swore an oath in His own name guaranteeing His promise (v. 16; cf. Heb. 6:13-14). God thus reinforced, reemphasized, and extended the promise that He had given formerly (12:1-3) because Abraham trusted and obeyed Him (vv. 17-18).

"Here again God promised Abraham that he would become the recipient of the covenant blessings. The covenant was not based on obedience, nor was the perpetuity of the covenant based on obedience—but rather the reception of covenant blessings was conditioned on obedience. Remember, an unconditional covenant may have conditional blessings."⁶³⁸

⁶³⁴Chisholm, "Anatomy of . . .," p. 13.

⁶³⁵This is the first explicit mention of the substitutionary sacrifice of one life for another in the Bible.

⁶³⁶Ross, "Genesis," p. 65.

⁶³⁷T. Desmond Alexander, "Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (February 1983):17.

⁶³⁸Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom . . .*, pp. 66-67.

Abraham's "seed" (v. 18) refers not only to Isaac but also to Messiah (cf. Gal. 3:16).

| THE FOUR SEEDS OF ABRAHAM IN SCRIPTURE |
|--|
| <p>NATURAL SEED All physical descendants of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 7; et al.)</p> |
| <p>NATURAL-SPIRITUAL SEED Believing physical descendants of Abraham (Romans 9:6, 8; Galatians 6:16)</p> |
| <p>SPIRITUAL SEED Believing non-physical descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9, 29)</p> |
| <p>ULTIMATE SEED Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16)</p> |

Abraham then returned to the well he had purchased at Beersheba and lived there (v. 19).

Moses probably preserved the details of this story because this test involved the future of God's promised seed, Isaac, and, therefore, the faithfulness of God. He probably did so also because this incident illustrates God's feelings in giving His Son as the Lamb of God (cf. John 1:29; 3:16). Other themes in this chapter include testing and obedience, the relationship between God and man, and the relationship between father and son.⁶³⁹

Every time Abraham made a sacrifice for God the Lord responded by giving Abraham more.

1. Abraham left his home; God gave him a new one.
2. Abraham offered the best of the land to Lot; God gave him more land.
3. Abraham gave up the King of Sodom's reward; God gave Abraham more wealth.

In each case God gave Abraham a deeper relationship with Himself as well as more material prosperity. Note the closeness of this fellowship in Abraham's response to God's revelations: "Here I am" (vv. 1, 11).

God has not promised Christians great physical blessings, but whenever we make a sacrifice for Him He gives us a deeper relationship with Himself at least. For this reason we should not fear making personal sacrifices for God.

⁶³⁹John Lawlor developed these other themes in "The Test of Abraham: Genesis 22:11-19," *Grace Theological Journal* 1:1 (Spring 1980):19-35.

Note too that what God called Abraham to give back to Him was something that He had provided for Abraham supernaturally in faithfulness to His promise. Sometimes God tests our faith by asking us to give back to Him what He has supernaturally and faithfully provided, not just what He has provided through regular channels.

This test of Abraham's faith is the climax of his personal history. It is the last major incident in the record of his life.

"... God does not demand a literal human sacrifice from His worshippers, but the spiritual sacrifice of an unconditional denial of the natural life, even to submission to death itself."⁶⁴⁰

The faithful believer will surrender to God whatever He may ask trusting in God's promise of provision and blessing.

15. The descendants of Nahor 22:20-24

The testing of Abraham's faith was complete with the sacrifice of Isaac. The Author therefore brought the history of his life to a close and began to set the scene for related events in Isaac's life.

This section signals a change in the direction of the narrative. It moves from Abraham to the next generation and its connections with the East. The record of Nahor's 12 sons prepares the way for the story of Isaac's marriage. It also shows that Rebekah ("heifer," or "soft, supple") was the daughter of Bethuel's wife Milcah (v. 23), not the daughter of Bethuel's concubine (v. 24). Isaac's marriage was very important because Isaac was the heir of the promises (ch. 24).

Only a few of the individuals named as descendants of Abraham's brother Nahor appear elsewhere in Scripture. The most important individuals were Rebekah and her father Bethuel. This is a segmented genealogy designed to establish family relationships, not a linear genealogy, which identifies the final descendant as the legitimate successor of the first (cf. Ruth 4:18-22).

16. The purchase of Sarah's tomb ch. 23

Abraham's purchase of a burial site in the Promised Land demonstrated his intention to remain in Canaan rather than going back to his native homeland. Since he was a sojourner in Canaan his friends probably expected him to bury Sarah back in their home area, namely, Mesopotamia.

The two major events contained in this chapter continue Moses' emphasis on God's faithfulness. They do so by recording the death of Abraham's wife, the mother of his heir, and by showing the beginning of the fulfillment of the land promise that God had given Abraham.

⁶⁴⁰Keil and Delitzsch, 1:252.

Sarah is the only woman whose age at death the Scriptures record (v. 1).⁶⁴¹ This fact illustrates her importance. Isaac was 37 years old when his mother died. Abraham died at the age of 175 (25:8), 38 years after Sarah.

Abraham and Sarah had moved back near Hebron after having lived at Beersheba for some time (v. 2; cf. 22:19).

"It should be stressed here that the world of the patriarchs was that of a developed and organized society and not what is usually regarded as a simple pastoral-bedouin existence. Throughout Genesis 12-50 there are connections to Mesopotamia and to Egypt as well as negotiations with local political centers (Shechem, Salem and Hebron) as well as Gerar in the Western Negev on a branch of the Coastal Highway.

"Much of the theological relevance of the patriarchs is based upon the fact that there were other more attractive lifestyles available to these early Biblical figures. The option they chose gave them few of the advantages they could have enjoyed elsewhere, especially in Mesopotamia where their family was established. In light of this fact and the great promises made to Abraham during his lifetime, his remark to the leaders of Hebron after the death of his wife, Sarah, takes on new meaning."⁶⁴²

Typically ancient Near Easterners buried family members in their native land.⁶⁴³ Abraham's desire to bury Sarah in the Promised Land shows that he had turned his back on Mesopotamia forever (v. 4). Canaan was his adopted homeland.

God had made Abraham a powerful person, which his neighbors acknowledged (v. 6).⁶⁴⁴

"Abraham has put himself at the bottom of the social ladder, and they put him at the top."⁶⁴⁵

"Their warm and generous reply apparently gave Abraham all he wanted, but permission to bury Sarah was only part of what he had requested. He had asked for a burial plot, not simply for the use of one of their graves. Despite the warmth of their reply, the Hittites, by omitting any mention of this point, probably indicate their reluctance to transfer land to Abraham, for then he would no longer be a landless sojourner."⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴¹She is also the only woman whose name God changed (17:15).

⁶⁴²Monson, pp. 153-54.

⁶⁴³Ross, "Genesis," p. 66.

⁶⁴⁴On Abraham as a "mighty prince," see Wiseman, "Abraham . . . Part II: Abraham the Prince," pp. 228-37.

⁶⁴⁵E. F. Roop, *Genesis*, p. 154.

⁶⁴⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 127. These Hittites were a Canaanite tribe, not members of the mighty Hittite Empire that later flourished north of the Promised Land in Syria.

Why did Ephron want to sell Abraham the entire plot of ground in which the cave lay rather than just the cave as Abraham requested (vv. 8-11)? Hittite law specified that when a landowner sold only part of his property to someone else the original owner had to continue to pay all taxes on the land. However if he sold the entire tract the new owner was responsible to pay the taxes (cf. 1 Chron. 21:24). Consequently Ephron held out for the entire tract knowing that Abraham needed to make his purchase quickly so he could bury Sarah.⁶⁴⁷

Abraham's willingness to pay what appears to have been an unusually large price for the land further demonstrates his faith (vv. 15-16). An average field cost four shekels per acre, and garden land cost 40 shekels per acre.⁶⁴⁸ Abraham was willing to pay 400 shekels. Of course, the text does not give the exact area of the property, but it appears to have been relatively small.

"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)."⁶⁴⁹

Ephron's responses to Abraham's requests sound very generous, but he was really making it difficult for Abraham to pay less than his asking price. Ephron's object may have been to get a present from Abraham for having given him the field and cave that would compensate for the value of the land. Such a gift was customary. On the other hand he may have wanted to preclude Abraham's offering to pay him less than his asking price (v. 15).⁶⁵⁰

"Did the patriarchs who forsook everything for the sake of the promises go unrewarded? No, answers our narrative. In death they were heirs and no longer 'strangers.' A very small part of the Promised Land—the grave—belonged to them; therefore they did not have to rest in 'Hittite earth' or in the grave of a Hittite (cf. v. 6), which Israel would have considered a hardship difficult to bear."⁶⁵¹

"At a time when the children of Israel were on their way to take possession of the land, Moses did well to remind them how in faith their forefathers had secured at least 'a grave which was his own property,' and thus to arouse in them the desire to finish the work of taking into full possession what had so long ago been promised to them."⁶⁵²

⁶⁴⁷Barker, p. 134.

⁶⁴⁸Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventy-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 1:356.

⁶⁴⁹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 135.

⁶⁵⁰See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:255-56; Leupold, 2:650; and G. C. Aalders, *Genesis*, 2:58-59.

⁶⁵¹von Rad, p. 250.

⁶⁵²Leupold, 2:653.

Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah (lit. double cave, or split cave) indicates his continuing faith in God's promise to give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants. Similarly Jeremiah purchased property in the Promised Land on the eve of the Babylonian captivity to express his belief that God would bring the Israelites back there eventually (cf. Jer. 32:6-15). One does not usually bury his family in a place unless he considers it his home and plans to be there a long time.

The writer noted twice that Hebron was within the land of Canaan (vv. 2, 19) and stressed repeatedly that the negotiations for the land were official (vv. 10, 13, 16, 18). There was no doubt that this part of the land now justly belonged to Abraham and his heirs.

"This verse [v. 20] is a conclusion to vv. 2-19. It seems strange appearing after v. 19—which would have been a reasonable note on which to conclude. Its placement here points out that the crucial element in this chapter is not Sarah's death, but Abraham's acquisition of land from outsiders. As such, it is a harbinger of things to come."⁶⁵³

"The very fact that Abraham buried Sarah in the land of Canaan is proof of his unwavering faith. Knowing that his descendants would have to endure four hundred years of bitter bondage in a foreign country (15:13), he looked beyond that to the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises."⁶⁵⁴

Isaac and Jacob as well as Abraham used this burial site. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah were all buried here. Rachel's tomb was near Bethlehem (lit. house of bread, i.e., granary).

The time of death should be the time when the godly proclaim their faith most loudly in view of our hope in God's promises.

17. The choice of a bride for Isaac ch. 24

Abraham's servant returned to Paddan-aram charged with the duty of finding a suitable bride for Isaac. He faithfully and resolutely fulfilled his task relying on God's faithfulness to prosper his journey and God's providence to guide him. God directed him to Rebekah.

The length of this story and the amount of detail included suggests that this incident played an important part in the fulfillment of the Author's purpose.⁶⁵⁵ The details show how God provided a wife and seed-bearer for Isaac and thus remained faithful to His promises to Abraham. God's working providentially through the natural course of events to accomplish His purposes clarifies His ways with humankind.

⁶⁵³Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 136.

⁶⁵⁴Davis, p. 223.

⁶⁵⁵See Brian A. Bompiani, "Is Genesis 24 a Problem for Source Criticism?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:656 (October-December 2007):403-15, for defense of the unity of this chapter.

"The key idea in the passage is in the word *hesed*, 'loyal love' or 'loyalty to the covenant'—from both God's perspective and man's."⁶⁵⁶

"This . . . narrative is the most pleasant and charming of all the patriarchal stories."⁶⁵⁷

The structure of the four sections (1-9, 10-28, 29-61, 62-67) is again palistrophic (chiastic). The first and fourth sections take place in Abraham's household in Canaan, and the second and third record events in Rebekah's household in Aram.

The thigh may be a euphemism for the genitals (v. 2).⁶⁵⁸ The ancients considered it to be the source of posterity and the seat of power (cf. 47:29).

"By putting his hand under Abraham's thigh, the servant was touching his genitals and thus giving the oath a special solemnity. In the ancient Orient, solemn oaths could be taken holding some sacred object in one's hand, as it is still customary to take an oath on the Bible before giving evidence in court. Since the OT particularly associates God with life (see the symbolism of the sacrificial law) and Abraham had been circumcised as a mark of the covenant, placing his hand under Abraham's thigh made an intimate association with some fundamental religious ideas. An oath by the seat of procreation is particularly apt in this instance, when it concerns the finding of a wife for Isaac."⁶⁵⁹

"That act would be significantly symbolic in this instance, for success of the mission would make possible propagation of posterity and fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant."⁶⁶⁰

"Isaac was not regarded as a merely pious candidate for matrimony, but as the heir of the promise, who must therefore be kept from any alliance with the race whose possessions were to come to his descendants, and which was ripening for the judgment to be executed by those descendants."⁶⁶¹

Camels were relatively rare in this era, so the fact that Abraham owned 10 of them reflects his great wealth (v. 10; cf. Job 1:3).⁶⁶² Verse 12 is the first recorded instance of prayer for specific guidance in Scripture. Since camels could drink 25 gallons, the servant's sign was sagacious (v. 14). It tested Rebekah's kindness, hospitality, industry, and willingness to help a stranger.

⁶⁵⁶Ross, "Genesis," p. 67.

⁶⁵⁷von Rad, p. 253.

⁶⁵⁸Ibid., p. 254; cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 327.

⁶⁵⁹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 141.

⁶⁶⁰Howard F. Vos, *Genesis*, p. 90. See R. David Freedman, "'Put Your Hand Under My Thigh'—The Patriarchal Oath," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 2:2 (June 1976):3-4, 42.

⁶⁶¹E. W. Hengstenberg, *Dissertations on the Genuineness of the Pentateuch*, 1:350.

⁶⁶²Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 142-43, 146.

"Although the Lord elects both Abraham and Rebekah, his mode of revelation to them is strikingly different. To Abraham he speaks (12:7) in visions and auditions, to Rebekah he communicates through answered prayer and providential acts (24:27, 48, 50)."⁶⁶³

"Another striking feature of this story is that after introducing the new characters of Laban and his household, the writer allows the servant again to retell the narrative (vv. 34-39). But as with most repetitions in biblical narrative, the retelling is not a mere repeating. It is rather a reassertion of the central points of the first narrative. . . . As we overhear the servant recount more details, we see that the miracle of God's provision was even more grand than that suggested in the narrative itself."⁶⁶⁴

It was customary in Hurrian society to consult the bride before completing the marriage plans (vv. 58-60). Also the brother took the lead in giving his sister in marriage. Note that Laban, Rebekah's brother, was the principle negotiator who represented the family rather than Bethuel, her father (cf. v. 50), or her mother (vv. 53, 55). Another view is that Bethuel was simply too old or was under his wife's thumb, as Rebekah later "organized" Isaac.⁶⁶⁵ The description of the family farewell also reflects Laban's leadership (vv. 59-60).⁶⁶⁶ Rebekah demonstrated her faith in Abraham's God by decisively choosing to leave her family to marry Isaac (cf. Ruth 1:16).

Beer-lahai-roi, where Isaac lived and meditated (v. 62), was a place where God had previously answered prayer (cf. 16:14). This suggests that he may have been praying for God's will to be done in the choice of his wife. Rebekah dismounted out of respect for her intended husband (cf. Josh. 15:18; 1 Sam. 25:23). Her self-veiling identified her as his bride since it was customary to veil the bride in a marriage ceremony. Normally Israelite women did not wear veils (cf. 12:14; 38:14).

"The final remarks (v. 67) again show that God's guidance in the mundane areas of life is good for those who put their trust in him. When Isaac took Rebekah as his wife, he loved her and was comforted with her after the death of his mother. In other words, Rebekah had taken the place of Sarah in the line of the descendants of Abraham."⁶⁶⁷

The significance of this long story in the larger context of special revelation is fourfold at least.

⁶⁶³Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 326.

⁶⁶⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 177.

⁶⁶⁵Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 149.

⁶⁶⁶See West, pp. 67-68; Speiser, pp. 184-85.

⁶⁶⁷Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 178.

1. Primarily it demonstrates God's faithfulness to His promise to provide descendants for Abraham and, therefore, His trustworthiness. Along with this is the assurance that even though Abraham was about to die God would fulfill His promises in the future.
2. It reveals that God guides people who are seeking His will so they discover it.
3. It illustrates God's selecting a bride for His Son out of the world through the agency of His Spirit, which the New Testament teaches.
4. It provides a good model, in the servant, of one who responded properly to the work of God. Abraham's servant prayed before he acted, praised when God answered his prayers, and lived believing that God controls all the affairs of life.

"There are two themes, one more central, one more auxiliary, which are highlighted by the example story [in Genesis 24]: the faithful, prudent and selfless steward acting on behalf of his master as messenger, and the good wife as a gift from the LORD, the theme underlying much of the steward's action."⁶⁶⁸

18. Abraham's death 25:1-11

Before Abraham died, he made sure that God's covenantal blessing would be Isaac's by sending his other sons away. After he died, God confirmed his decision by blessing Isaac.

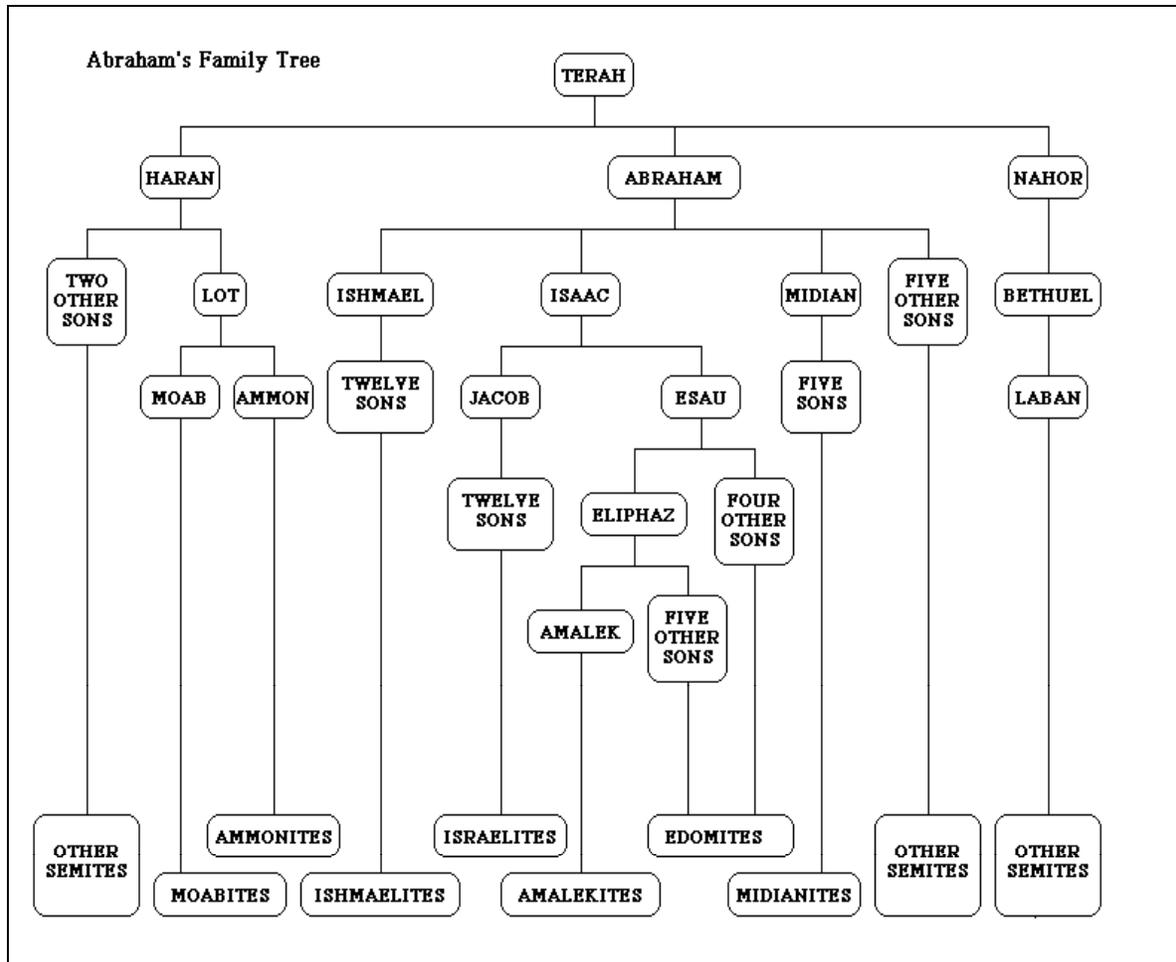
"In the short span of one chapter, the writer shows how Isaac's entire life was a repetition of that which happened to Abraham. Thus the lesson is that God's faithfulness in the past can be counted on in the present and the future. What he has done for the fathers, he will also do for the sons."⁶⁶⁹

Abraham's sons by Keturah 25:1-6

Keturah (lit. enveloped in fragrant smoke) may have been a concubine like Hagar (v. 6; 1 Chron. 1:32). It is not possible to prove that Abraham married Keturah and that she bore him six sons after Sarah's death, though this was probably the case. He may have married her earlier in his life while Sarah was alive.

⁶⁶⁸Wolfgang M. W. Roth, "The Wooing of Rebekah: A Tradition-Critical Study of Genesis 24," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 (1972):181.

⁶⁶⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 186.



The information revealed in these verses may appear at this point in the narrative simply to introduce the Midianites who come into prominence later in Genesis. They were a group of tribes that inhabited the deserts surrounding Israel. Probably Moses also included this data because this passage confirms God's faithfulness in giving Abraham many descendants, though Isaac and his branch of the family would be the recipients of God's special blessings.

In this section and the following two (vv. 7-11 and 12-19) those characters who play minor parts in the drama take their curtain calls making way for the chief actors who follow.

God's promise that "through Isaac your descendants shall be named" (21:12) led Abraham to act as he did as Moses recorded here.

"The land of the East" (v. 6) to which Abraham sent his sons other than Isaac was evidently Arabia. It lay to the east and south of Canaan.

"In this case the sending away of the sons is to make Isaac's position more secure."⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁷⁰Loren Fisher, "An Amarna Age Prodigal," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 3:2 (April 1958):119.

Abraham's death and Isaac's blessing 25:7-11

Isaac would have been 75 years old and Jacob 15 when Abraham died (v. 7; cf. 21:5; 25:26).⁶⁷¹ Abraham lived 100 years in the Promised Land (cf. 12:4).

"It is one thing to live a long life. It is another thing to live a long life that is also a happy life. This obituary notice about Abraham draws attention to the fact that Abraham died not only at an elderly age but in a frame of mind filled with inner *shalom* and satisfaction. That is the thrust of the phrase *full of days* or 'contented.'"⁶⁷²

The phrase "gathered to his people" (v. 8) implies reunion in Sheol, the place of departed spirits, with friends who had died previously. It presupposes continued personal existence after physical death (cf. 15:15; Heb. 11:13).

Abraham was buried in the Cave of Machpelah near Mamre, the old site that later became a part of Hebron (v. 9).

God's dealings now focus on Isaac who presently lived near Hagar's well at Beer-lahai-roi (v. 11; cf. 16:14; 24:62).⁶⁷³

God's servants should do all in their power to insure the continuation of God's program to bless from one generation to the next.

B. WHAT BECAME OF ISHMAEL 25:12-18

"The last four *toledot* sections of the Book of Genesis follow a definite pattern: the lines in each generation that are not chosen lines are traced before the narrative returns to the chosen line."⁶⁷⁴

This section records God's faithfulness to His promises to make Ishmael a great nation and to give him many descendants (16:10; 21:18). This is another of the 10 family histories that Genesis records (see the outline in the introduction to these notes).⁶⁷⁵

These verses show that God fulfilled His promises regarding Ishmael (16:10-12; 17:20). Ishmael, like Nahor and Jacob, fathered 12 sons. Moses drew his personal history to a conclusion before he moved on to concentrate on his brother Isaac.

"The mention of 'twelve tribal rulers' . . . recalls the word of the Lord regarding the future of the line of Ishmael from 17:20, where it was promised that he too would be blessed and that 'twelve rulers' . . . would be born to him and become a great nation."⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷¹See the chart "Patriarchal Chronological Data" earlier in these notes.

⁶⁷²Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 167.

⁶⁷³Archaeologists have yet to find this site. It was evidently somewhere south of Beersheba in the Negev.

⁶⁷⁴Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 429.

⁶⁷⁵There is probably an intentional parallel with the 10 nations mentioned in the Table of Nations (ch. 10) suggesting that God would bless all the families of the earth through other special families.

⁶⁷⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 181.

The Ishmaelites lived in Arabia. Arabia lay to the southeast of Canaan and extended from the Euphrates River to the Red Sea.⁶⁷⁷ Probably the Ishmaelites were once a confederation of tribes like the Israelites.

"The names of the twelve princes descending from Ishmael are applied not only to tribal divisions but also to geographical localities (cf. v. 16)."⁶⁷⁸

The writer probably included the fact that Ishmael lived "in defiance of all his relations" (v. 18) to show the fulfillment of God's prediction to Hagar (cf. 16:12). The bedouin-like Ishmaelites later had many conflicts with their more settled Israelite relations.

God is faithful to His promises to bless whom He has promised to bless.

C. WHAT BECAME OF ISAAC 25:19—35:29

A new *toledot* begins with 25:19. Its theme is "the acquisition of the blessing and its development and protection by the Lord."⁶⁷⁹

Moses set up the whole Jacob narrative in a chiasmic structure that emphasizes the fulfillment of the promise of the seed and the seed's prosperity.

- "A Oracle sought; Rebekah struggles in childbirth; *bekorah* birthright; birth; themes of strife, deception, fertility (25:19-34).
- B Interlude: strife; deception; *berakah* blessing; covenant with foreigner (26).
- C Deception; *berakah* stolen; fear of Esau; flight from land (27:1-28:9).
- D Encounter (<*paga*'>) with the divine at sacred site near border; *berakah* (28:10-22).
- E Internal cycle opens: arrival; Laban at border; deception; wages; Rachel barren; Leah fertile (29:1-30:21).
- F Rachel fertile; Jacob increases the herds (30:22-43).
- E' Internal cycle closes: departure; Laban at border; deception; wages (31).
- D' Encounters (<*paga*'>) with divine beings at sacred sites near border; *berakah* (32).
- C' Deception planned; fear of Esau; *berakah* gift returned; return to land (33).
- B' Interlude: strife; deception; covenant with foreigner (34).
- A' Oracle fulfilled; Rachel struggles in childbirth; *berakah*; death resolutions (35:1-22)."⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁷Josephus, 1:12:4.

⁶⁷⁸Davis, p. 231.

⁶⁷⁹Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 433.

⁶⁸⁰Ibid., p. 85. Cf. Fishbane, p. 42; Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 169; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 352.

The Flood story also has a palistrophic structure, and both stories have a similar statement at the middle (turning point): God remembered Noah (8:1) and God remembered Rachel (30:22). This emphasizes that God controls events and saves His people.

" . . . the author of Genesis has deliberately split the Jacob-Joseph story into two parts by putting the family history of Esau 36:1—37:1 in the middle. This allows him to alternate the genealogies of the non-elect lines of Ishmael (25:12-18) and Esau (36:1—37:1) with the fuller family histories of the chosen lines of Terah (Abraham) (11:27—25:11), Isaac (Jacob) (25:19—35:29), and Jacob (Joseph) (37:2—50:26) to produce a total of five patriarchal family histories. This matches the five family histories of pre-patriarchal times . . ." ⁶⁸¹

1. Isaac's twin sons 25:19-26

Verses 19-34 introduce the whole Jacob and Esau saga.

In the first pericope (25:19-26) we have the record of God answering Isaac's prayers by making Rebekah fertile (blessing). He gave her two sons, Esau and Jacob, and foretold that from them two nations would come with the elder serving the younger.

The emphasis of this section is on the divine oracle (v. 23) as is clear from the chiasmic structure of the narrative.

- "A Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah (20).
- B Rebekah was barren; prayer for children was answered (21a).
- C His wife Rebekah conceived (21b). The children struggled together within her (22a).
- D Rebekah asks for an oracle (22b)
- D' Yahweh grants her an oracle (23)
- C' Her days to be delivered were fulfilled (24a). And behold, there were twins in her womb (24b).
- B' Jacob and Esau are contrasted in birth and appearance (25-26a).
- A' Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah bore the twins (26b)."⁶⁸²

The question of an heir continues primary in this section. Who will be Isaac's heir through whom God will fulfill His promises? Rebekah, like Sarah, was barren (v. 21). After 20 years of waiting and praying (vv. 21-22) God gave her children. Which of these two sons would be the blessed heir? God intervened to announce His foreordained choice (v. 23). Jacob's reactions to his election over Esau were quite different from Isaac's reactions to God's choice of him as Abraham's heir, as this section begins to illustrate.

⁶⁸¹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 168.

⁶⁸²Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 436. Cf. Michael Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19—35:22)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 26:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1975):15-38.

Scripture does not give the reason God chose Jacob over Esau. What we do know is that His choice did not rest on the superior merit of Jacob but on the sovereign prerogative of Yahweh (Rom. 9:10-13). In ancient Near Eastern culture the first-born normally became his father's heir. So in designating Jacob as Isaac's heir God sovereignly overruled natural custom by supernatural revelation. The response of the members of Isaac's family to this revelation demonstrates their faith, or lack of it. However the main point of the narrative is to trace God's faithfulness and power in bringing to pass what He had promised.

"The revelation of the Divine will concerning the two brothers (ver. 23) was evidently no secret. It is clear that both Esau and Jacob knew of it. This fact is in some respects the key to the true interpretation of this incident [i.e., vv. 29-34]."⁶⁸³

- 25:19-20 Paddan-aram means "the flat (land) of Aram." Aram was the area near Haran. People from this region became known as Arameans, and later the Greeks called them Syrians. Bethuel was a semi-nomadic herdsman, and he probably lived in the open fields at least part of the year.
- 25:21 Rebekah was barren for 20 years after she married Isaac (vv. 20, 26). God closed her womb so the chosen family would recognize her children as the fruit of His grace rather than simply the fruit of nature.⁶⁸⁴
- 25:22-23 Rebekah's pregnancy was so painful that she wondered if there was any point going on living. She expressed the same thought when her sons had grown up (27:46). God's choice of the younger over the elder "was contrary to ancient Near Eastern custom, but the elective purposes of God transcend custom."⁶⁸⁵ The divine oracle summarizes the careers of Jacob and Esau and is similar to 12:1-3 in that both statements are programmatic. All of Jacob's scheming to obtain the birthright and the blessing was unnecessary since God promised that he would become the dominant nation.
- 25:24-26 "Reddish" (Heb. *'admoni*) is a wordplay with "Edomites," Esau's descendants. Esau means "hairy one" (Heb. *sa'ar*, similar to "Seir," later the Edomites' perhaps wooded homeland). Jacob means "El will protect."⁶⁸⁶ The Hebrew *ya'aqob* ("Jacob") is similar to *'aqeb* ("heel"). From Jacob's grasping Esau's heel at birth came the nickname "heel-holder" (i.e., one who outwits by trickery) "just as in wrestling an attempt may be made to throw the opponent by grasping the heel."⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸³Thomas, p. 230.

⁶⁸⁴Isaac was the only monogamous patriarch among the first three: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

⁶⁸⁵Davis, p. 232.

⁶⁸⁶Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 178. Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, p. 288, wrote that hairiness seems to have been a mark of incivility in the ancient world, of an animal-like nature. See also Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 356.

⁶⁸⁷Keil and Delitzsch, 1:268.

The lesson to be learned is that those who owe their existence to God's creation and election can acknowledge His hand at work in the affairs of their lives.

2. The sale of the birthright 25:27-34

25:27-28 Abraham died when the twins were 15 (25:7), so they grew up knowing their grandfather and undoubtedly hearing his stories of God's promises to their family. Esau became a nomadic hunter, but Jacob remained in his tents.

". . . they became the personification of the two different ways of life which would have been typical for Palestine at this period of history: that of hunter and nomad (Esau) and that of shepherd and semi-nomad (Jacob) . . . Esau is described as a 'skilled hunter,' 'a man of the outdoors;' Jacob, on the other hand, is portrayed as 'a simple man,' one 'remaining in his tents,' that is, a man of stable life in contrast to the rootless life of the nomad."⁶⁸⁸

"The two characters are utter opposites, as the two nations will eventually be."⁶⁸⁹

The Hebrew word *tam*, translated "plain," probably means civilized and domesticated, a homebody.⁶⁹⁰ It may imply a quiet, self-contained, detached personality, complete in himself.⁶⁹¹

"Descriptions of Jacob's early life in the Scriptures paint an interpersonal portrait of a highly narcissistic individual who grew up in a family of origin ripe for producing such pathology."⁶⁹²

Adam failed in eating, Noah in drinking, and Isaac in tasting. Isaac became a gourmand, one who loves certain types of food.

"A marriage made in heaven (see 24:1-67) can end in dysfunction when a spouse gives priority to taste in the mouth over a voice in the heart (see 26:35)."⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁸Donald B. Sharp, "In Defense of Rebecca," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 10:4 (October 1980):165.

⁶⁸⁹Kidner, p. 152.

⁶⁹⁰Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 181. Cf. Nichol, 1:369; and Carl D. Evans, "The Patriarch Jacob—An 'Innocent Man,'" *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1985):32-37.

⁶⁹¹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 177.

⁶⁹²Vance L. Shepperson, "Jacob's Journey: From Narcissism Toward Wholeness," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12:3 (1984):180.

⁶⁹³Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 363.

25:29-30 The Hebrew word translated "stew" literally means "lentils." Esau wanted to "gulp it down" (Heb. *la'at*).

25:31-34 The way Jacob stated his demand suggests that he had long premeditated his act and ruthlessly exploited his brother's weakness. His insistence that Esau swear to him strengthens this impression. Jacob's lack of compassion and hospitality contrasts with that of Abraham (18:1-8) and Lot (19:1-8). It was right that he valued the birthright, but it was wrong that he obtained it as he did. Because Esau despised his birthright Jacob obtained it and became what God had promised He would become, the stronger son who would lead (v. 23). Explicit moral commentary is rare in the Bible, so the writer's inclusion of it here marks something about Esau that he did not want the reader to miss.

"The cunning hunter fell into a better hunter's trap,
becoming prey to his own appetite."⁶⁹⁴

The writer showed that the natures of the two sons were very different; they were not identical twins. Esau cared only for physical and material things whereas Jacob valued the spiritual. Esau gave priority to the immediate satisfaction of his sensual desires, but Jacob was willing to wait for something better that God had promised in the future (cf. Heb. 12:16).

"The frivolity with which he [Esau] sold his birthright . . . rendered him unfit to be the heir and possessor of the promised grace."⁶⁹⁵

"From one human perspective, Esau, who functions as a foil to Jacob, is much more likeable than Jacob. From the divine viewpoint, however, he is rejected because he rejects his right to inherit the divinely given vision of his fathers."⁶⁹⁶

The birthright was the privilege of being chief of the tribe and head of the family (27:29). In Isaac's family it entitled the bearer to the blessing of Yahweh's promise (27:4, 27-29), which included the possession of Canaan and covenant fellowship with God (28:4). It included a double portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:17) and the privilege of being the priest (spiritual leader) of the family.⁶⁹⁷

"It is quite apparent from the Nuzi tablets that instances of the transference of birthright, such as occurred in the Patriarchal narratives, were not uncommon in Hurrian society. One example concerns a certain Zirteshup,

⁶⁹⁴Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 449.

⁶⁹⁵Keil and Delitzsch, 1:269.

⁶⁹⁶Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 352.

⁶⁹⁷See Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 185; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, pp. 41-42, 53; and I. Mendelsohn, "On the Preferential Status of the Eldest Son," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 156 (December 1959):38-40.

whose father disowned him but later restored his status. . . . Another instance of the transference of birthright from the Nuzi tablets is the exchange by one Kurpazah of his birthright in consideration for three sheep given to him by Tupkitilla, his brother. In the light of this example, Esau's willingness to exchange his birthright for Jacob's mess of pottage (Gen. 25:29-34) is perhaps more understandable."⁶⁹⁸

Even though Esau was a cunning hunter he placed little value on his privilege as the first-born son. He was willing to trade it to his crafty brother for a meal of "red stuff," a fitting description of his own nature.⁶⁹⁹

The structure of the narrative again identifies the writer's emphasis, this time Esau's disdain for his birthright (v. 32).

- "A Jacob was boiling pottage (29a).
- B Esau came in from the field; he was tired (29b).
- C wayyo'mer 'esaw: Let me eat some of that red pottage . . . , I am so tired! (30)
- D wayyo'mer ya'aqob: First sell me your *bkrh* (31).
- E wayyo'mer 'esaw: I depart; I die! Of what use is a *bkrh* to me? (32).
- D' wayyo'mer ya'aqob: Swear to me first. So he swore to him and sold his *bkrh* to Jacob (33).
- C' Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; he ate and he drank (34aa).
- B' He rose and went his way (34ab).
- A' Thus Esau despised his birthright (34b)."⁷⁰⁰

There are two important instances of first-born sons relinquishing the rights of primogeniture in Genesis: Esau and Reuben. Esau considered his birthright of so little value that he sold all his rights as first-born to Jacob to realize an immediate physical gratification. Reuben forfeited his birthright through sexual promiscuity (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4). In Esau's case, his entire birthright went to Jacob. In Reuben's, his went to three of his brothers. Judah obtained the regal right, Levi eventually received the priestly right, and the blessing of the double portion went to Joseph who realized it through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.⁷⁰¹

In reading this pericope many have concluded that God chose Jacob over Esau because He foresaw that Jacob would value the promises and the birthright, whereas Esau would not. This is not correct. Jacob valued the spiritual because God gave him the grace to do

⁶⁹⁸West, p. 71.

⁶⁹⁹See Richard D. Patterson, "The Old Testament Use of an Archetype: The Trickster," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:3 (September 1999):385-94, for a helpful discussion of instances of trickery in the Old Testament.

⁷⁰⁰Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 446.

⁷⁰¹See Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, pp. 138-40.

so. In the previous generation Isaac was the recipient of God's grace while Lot and Ishmael were not. Abraham was, too, whereas his brothers were not.

In this incident Jacob manifested spiritual perception. Some writers have suggested that he was impatient and took fleshly initiative like his grandfather (cf. 12:10-20; 16; 20). Note, however, that Moses blamed Esau, not Jacob, in this event (v. 34).

"How often do we put the question to ourselves, 'What is my mess of pottage?' It is important to verbalize the question. We are in constant danger of being tempted to give up something very precious in order to indulge a sudden strong desire. The desire may involve greedy eating and drinking, lusting after money or material things, letting loose our anger in abandonment of reason, succumbing to depression without check, cursing God in despair or disappointment without even thinking of the trap Satan set for Job and is setting for us, giving in to a sweeping sexual desire without waiting for the right framework. The mess of pottage that is dangerous to you and to me is any temptation to gratify the 'feelings' of the immediate moment in a way that shows we 'despise' the promises of the living God for our future."⁷⁰²

This section is a warning that profane (secular) people who live to satisfy their fleshly appetites will lose more valuable things of lasting spiritual worth. Christians who live for the present will not lose their salvation, but they will lose some of their eternal reward (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15).

3. Isaac and Abimelech 26:1-11

God prevented Isaac from leaving the Promised Land and renewed the covenant with him, but then He had to protect Rebekah when Isaac lied about his relationship with her to Abimelech.

"In the short span of one chapter, the writer shows how the whole of the life of Isaac was a rehearsal of that which happened to Abraham. Thus the lesson that is conveyed is that God's faithfulness in the past can be counted on in the present and the future. What he has done for the fathers, he will also do for the sons."⁷⁰³

Whereas the events of Isaac's life repeated those of Abraham's on several occasions, God dealt with Isaac differently and in harmony with his individual character. The many parallels between this chapter and the story of Abraham (esp. chs. 12—14 and 20—21) show that the writer wanted the reader to compare and contrast the two men.⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰²Edith Schaeffer, "What Is My Mess of Pottage?" *Christianity Today* (March 14, 1975), p. 50.

⁷⁰³Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 185.

⁷⁰⁴See Garrett, p. 136, or Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 366, for several striking parallels.

"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."⁷⁰⁵

"The chapter before us is full of illustrations of how difficulties should and should not be met."⁷⁰⁶

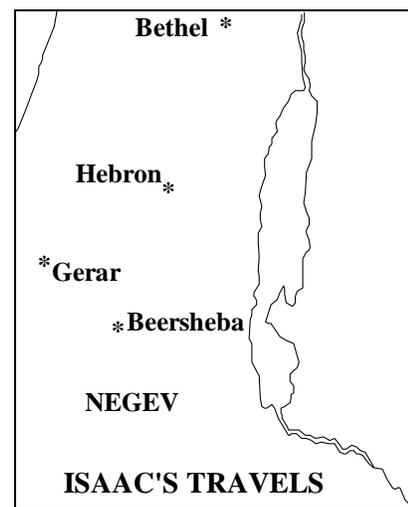
26:1-6

Isaac was evidently considering going to Egypt to escape the famine. He was in Gerar when God spoke to him. This was God's first revelation to Isaac (cf. 25:23). Therefore, it appears that Isaac may have previously moved north from Beer-lahai-roi. Of course, constant relocating was common for the nomadic patriarchs, and these places were not far from one another.

The major migration of the Philistines into Canaan took place in the twelfth century B.C. However, there were some Philistines already in Canaan at this time, as is clear from this reference and others in Genesis (cf. 21:32, 34).

God's will for Isaac to remain in the land was definite, and He communicated it clearly to the patriarch. Perhaps God wanted Isaac to stay in the land so he would learn that God would "be with you and bless you" (v. 3). God reiterated His promise to Abraham to give Isaac a promise to believe and encouragement to obey Him.⁷⁰⁷

The promise, however, was that God would protect and bless Isaac, multiply his descendants, and give them "all these lands" (v. 4; i.e., the lands held by the various Canaanite tribes). The reason for God's blessing of Isaac was Abraham's obedience to God (v. 5). Isaac became the spiritual beneficiary of a godly parent, but he had the opportunity to increase God's blessing on him through his own obedience to God.



⁷⁰⁵Charles R. Erdman, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 86.

⁷⁰⁶Thomas, p. 238.

⁷⁰⁷Promises of protection are also prominent in the Jacob story (cf. 26:24; 28:15, 20; 31:3, 5, 42; 32:10).

"The Abrahamic blessing will pass to Isaac. Everything included in that blessing will now belong to the son, and in turn will be passed on to his sons. But there is a contingency involved: if they are to enjoy the full blessings, they will have to obey the word of the LORD. And so obedience is enjoined here, with the example of how well Abraham obeyed."⁷⁰⁸

Verse 5 sounds like Abraham kept the commands, statutes, and laws of the Mosaic Covenant before they were in existence. It seems to contradict 15:6 that says God justified Abraham because of his faith.

"Ultimately, we should attempt to find the meaning of this verse in the larger strategy and purpose of the Pentateuch. Did the author of the Pentateuch intend to depict Abraham as a model of faith or as a model of obedience to the law? Curiously enough, the overwhelming majority of biblical scholars have read this passage as if the verse intended to show Abraham's life as an example of obedience to the law (*Gesetzesgehorsam*).

"It appears reasonable to conclude . . . that the importance of Gen 26:5 lies in what it tells us about the meaning of the deuteronomic terms it uses. It is as if the author of the Pentateuch has seized on the Abrahamic narratives as a way to explain his concept of 'keeping the law.' The author uses the life of Abraham, *not Moses*, to illustrate that one *can* fulfill the righteous requirement of the law. In choosing Abraham and not Moses, the author shows that 'keeping the law' means 'believing in God,' just as Abraham believed God and was counted righteous (Gen 15:6). In effect the author of the Pentateuch says, 'Be like Abraham. Live a life of faith and it can be said that you are keeping the law.'"⁷⁰⁹

"Israel would immediately see Torah (Law) terminology in the record of Abraham, and would be prompted to keep the Law."⁷¹⁰

26:7-11 For an explanation of this strange incident, see the notes on chapter 20. When endangered, Isaac, like Abraham, resorted to an ethic in which the end justified the means. "Like father, like son." Isaac and Rebekah must have been childless at this time.

⁷⁰⁸The NET Bible note on 26:3.

⁷⁰⁹John H. Sailhamer, "The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (Fall 1991):253, 254.

⁷¹⁰Ross, "Genesis," p. 71.

A period of between 70 and 97 years had elapsed between Abraham's sojourn in Gerar and Isaac's. Abimelech could have been the same man in both cases since lifespans of 150 years were not uncommon at this time. Abimelech demonstrated pious conduct in both cases. In the first, however, Abimelech took Sarah into his harem, but in the second he wanted to protect Rebekah from his people. Abimelech is a title rather than a personal name and means "royal father." Thus this may have been another ruler than the one Abraham dealt with.

4. Isaac's wells 26:12-33

26:12-17 This section of verses shows God's faithfulness in blessing Isaac as He had promised (cf. v. 3; 24:1; 25:11). Isaac enjoyed a bountiful harvest (v. 12). Abimelech testified to Isaac's power (v. 16), which was another testimony to God's faithfulness.

26:18-22 Isaac reopened the wells that Abraham had dug but the native inhabitants had filled with earth. He also dug three new wells. In contrast with Abraham, Isaac "was called not so much to pioneer as to consolidate."⁷¹¹

This incident shows God's blessing of Isaac, too. Water in the wilderness is a strong symbol of God's supernatural blessing in spite of nature.

The incident also reveals the peaceful character of this patriarch who did not battle his neighbors for the wells, even though he was stronger than they (v. 16). His actions express his trust in Yahweh.⁷¹²

Isaac's decision to sojourn in Gerar and the territory of the Philistines (vv. 1-22) seems to have been unwise but not sinful. Though he sinned in misrepresenting his relationship to Rebekah out of fear (v. 7), his choice to live in Gerar was not sinful. It did, however, open him to temptation and trials that he probably would have avoided if he had stayed away from Gerar.

26:23-25 Isaac returned to Beersheba where Abraham had lived occasionally. There God appeared to him (his second revelation) calming his fears and reviewing the promises that He had given previously (vv. 2-5). Isaac's response was to build an altar, worship Yahweh, and settle down there.

Settlers could only continue to live in an area where there was a well. Wells were vital to the life of nomadic herdsman. While there was probably at least one well at Beersheba already, Isaac dug another for his own use, or perhaps because he needed more water. His ability to dig wells indicates both his wealth and his intention to establish permanent residence in the land.

⁷¹¹Kidner, p. 154.

⁷¹²See note on 48:22.

These verses seem to confirm the fact that Isaac's decision to move out of Philistine territory pleased God.

26:26-33 Abimelech again testified to God's blessing of Isaac and gave God glory (vv. 28-29).

Isaac and Abimelech made a parity covenant of mutual non-aggression. They sealed it by eating a meal together. Eating together was often a sacred rite in the ancient Near East. This covenant renewed the older one made between Abimelech and Abraham (21:31). The exchange of oaths and Isaac's naming the town Beersheba again (cf. 21:31) also strengthened this agreement.

". . . this account of Isaac's dealings with the Philistines portrays Isaac as very much walking in his father's footsteps. He receives similar promises, faces similar tests, fails similarly, but eventually triumphs in like fashion. Indeed, in certain respects he is given more in the promises and achieves more. He is promised 'all these lands [v. 4],' and by the end of the story he is securely settled in Beersheba and has a treaty with the Philistines in which they acknowledge his superiority."⁷¹³

God's people must maintain confident trust in God's promise of His presence and provision in spite of the envy and hostility of unbelievers that His blessing sometimes provokes.

5. Jacob's deception for Isaac's blessing 26:34—28:9

Reacting to Isaac's disobedient plan to bless Esau, Jacob and Rebekah stole the blessing by deception. Esau became so angry with Jacob over his trickery that Jacob had to flee for his life.

Two reports of Esau's marriages (26:34-35 and 28:6-9) frame the major account (27:1—28:5) providing a prologue and epilogue. Esau's marriages are significant because Rebekah used them to persuade Isaac to send Jacob away to get a wife (27:4b) and because they were the reason Isaac did so (28:1).

The main account centers on Isaac giving the blessing.

- "A Isaac and the son of the *brkh/bkrh* (=Esau) (27:1-5).
- B Rebekah sends Jacob on the stage (27:6-17).
- C Jacob appears before Isaac and receives blessing (27:18-29).
- C' Esau appears before Isaac and receives antiblessing (27:30-40).
- B' Rebekah sends Jacob from the stage (27:41-45).
- A' Isaac and the son of *brkh/bkrh* (=Jacob!) (27:46—28:5)."⁷¹⁴

⁷¹³Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 196.

⁷¹⁴Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 474. Cf. Fokkelman, p. 101.

Esau's marriage 26:34-35

We can identify three purposes for this brief section.

1. Moses explained and justified the reason for Jacob's later departure for Paddan-aram (27:46—28:2).
2. Moses identified the ancestors of the Edomites who later played a major role in Israel's history.
3. Moses revealed Esau's carnal character again. Esau showed no interest in the special calling of his family but sought to establish himself as a great man in the world by marrying Canaanite women (cf. 11:4). These were evidently the daughters of Canaanite lords.⁷¹⁵ The Canaanites were, of course, under God's curse (9:25-27). Contrast Esau's method of securing wives with Abraham's plan to identify God's choice of a wife for Isaac.

"These preliminary notices [in verses 34 and 35] put into perspective the cunning deed of Jacob and Rebekah. They demonstrate that Esau was not fit to inherit the blessing."⁷¹⁶

Isaac's blessing 27:1—28:5

Here we have the third round of Jacob's battle with Esau. The first was at birth (25:21-28) and the second was over the birthright (25:29-34). In all three incidents Jacob manipulated his brother—unnecessarily, in view of God's promise (25:23).

"This chapter [27] offers one of the most singular instances of God's overruling providence controlling the affairs of sinful men and so disposing of them that the interests of God's kingdom are safeguarded. Usually the guilt of Jacob is overemphasized, and Esau is regarded as relatively or entirely the innocent party in the transaction. This traditional view requires modification and correction."⁷¹⁷

"This chapter portrays an entire family attempting to carry out their responsibilities by their physical senses, without faith. . . .

"All the natural senses play a conspicuous part—especially the sense of taste in which Isaac prided himself, but which gave him the wrong answer, Reliance on one's senses for spiritual discernment not only proves fallible, but often fouls up life unduly.

"Most importantly, however, the story is about deception."⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁵Josephus, 1:18:4. See K. Luke, "Esau's Marriage," *Indian Theological Studies* 25:2 (June 1988):171-90.

⁷¹⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 189.

⁷¹⁷Leupold, 2:735.

⁷¹⁸Ross, "Genesis," pp. 72, 73.

An oral blessing was as legally binding as a written will in the ancient Near East.⁷¹⁹

"As in modern society, inheritance under Nuzi law was effected by testamentary disposition, although the tablets indicate that such a testament was often made orally. One of the tablets tells of a lawsuit between brothers concerning the possession of their late father's slave girl, Sululi-Ishtar. The youngest of three brothers, Tarmiya, was defending his elder brothers' claim to Sululi-Ishtar and the tablet sets out his testimony:

'My father, Huya, was sick and lay on a couch; then my father seized my hand and spoke thus to me. "My other sons, being older, have acquired a wife; so I give herewith Sululi-Ishtar as your wife.'"

"In the end result the Court found in favour of Tarmiya, upholding his father's oral testamentary disposition.

"It also appears from another Nuzi tablet that even an oral testament commenced with an opening introductory statement such as: 'Now that I am grown old' which was the legal phraseology to indicate that what was to follow constituted a testamentary disposition. In similar manner, Isaac indicated to his elder son Esau that he wished to bestow upon him his testamentary blessing: 'Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death' (Genesis 27:2)."⁷²⁰

27:1-4 Abraham's life ended with happiness, success, and a strong character. In contrast, physical and spiritual decay marked Isaac's old age.⁷²¹

"In this the infirmity of his [Isaac's] flesh is evident. At the same time, it was not merely because of his partiality for Esau, but unquestionably on account of the natural rights of the firstborn, that he wished to impart the blessing to him, just as the desire to do this before his death arose from the consciousness of his patriarchal call."⁷²²

". . . Isaac's sensuality is more powerful than his theology."⁷²³

⁷¹⁹See Davis, p. 239.

⁷²⁰West, p. 71. See also Ephraim Speiser, "I Know Not the Day of My Death," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74 (1955):252-56.

⁷²¹Meir Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 350. See Bruce K. Waltke, "Reflections on Retirement from the Life of Isaac," *Crux* 32 (December 1996):4-14.

⁷²²Keil and Delitzsch, 1:274.

⁷²³Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 206.

27:5-17 It seems consistent with the character of Rebekah as presented elsewhere in Genesis to interpret her actions here as commendable. A sincere desire to make sure that Isaac's blessing went to the divinely chosen, more responsible of her sons apparently motivated her. While her motive seems to have been good, her method evidenced lack of faith in God.⁷²⁴ She tried to pull the wool over Isaac's eyes.

"Jacob is clearly less concerned with the rightness, the morality, of his mother's suggestion than he is with what happens to him if his disguise is discovered and his impersonation revealed."⁷²⁵

People used the black, silk-like hair of the camel-goat of the East (v. 16) as a substitute for human hair as late as the Roman period.⁷²⁶

27:18-29 The response to Isaac's blessing in verse 23 is proleptic; it refers to the blessing in verses 27-29, not another blessing that preceded this one.

Isaac uttered his blessing (vv. 27-29) in poetic language and God's Spirit doubtless inspired it since it proved to be prophetic (cf. 49:1-27; Deut. 33; et al.). It was an oracle.

The writer mentioned two of the elements in the Abrahamic promises specifically here: possession of the land, and numerous descendants. He generalized the third element, the blessing of the nations, in verse 29c.

"Since the intention to give the blessing to Esau the firstborn did not spring from proper feelings toward Jehovah and His promises, the blessing itself, as the use of the word *Elohim* instead of Jehovah or *El Shaddai* (cf. xxviii. 3) clearly shows, could not rise to the full height of the divine blessings of salvation, but referred chiefly to the relation in which the two brothers and their descendants would stand to one another, the theme with which Isaac's soul was entirely filled. It was only the painful discovery that, in blessing against his will, he had been compelled to follow the saving counsel of God, which awakened in him the consciousness of his patriarchal vocation, and gave him the spiritual power to impart the 'blessing of Abraham' to the son whom he had kept back, but whom Jehovah had chosen, when he was about to send him away to Haran (xxviii. 3, 4)."⁷²⁷

⁷²⁴See Sharp, pp. 164-68.

⁷²⁵Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 216.

⁷²⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 1:275, n. 1.

⁷²⁷*Ibid.*, 1:276-77.

27:30-45

Isaac evidently knew that he had been resisting God's will and finally accepted defeat submissively (v. 33). Besides in that culture a paternal blessing, much more a divine oracle, such as the one Isaac had uttered, was irrevocable.⁷²⁸

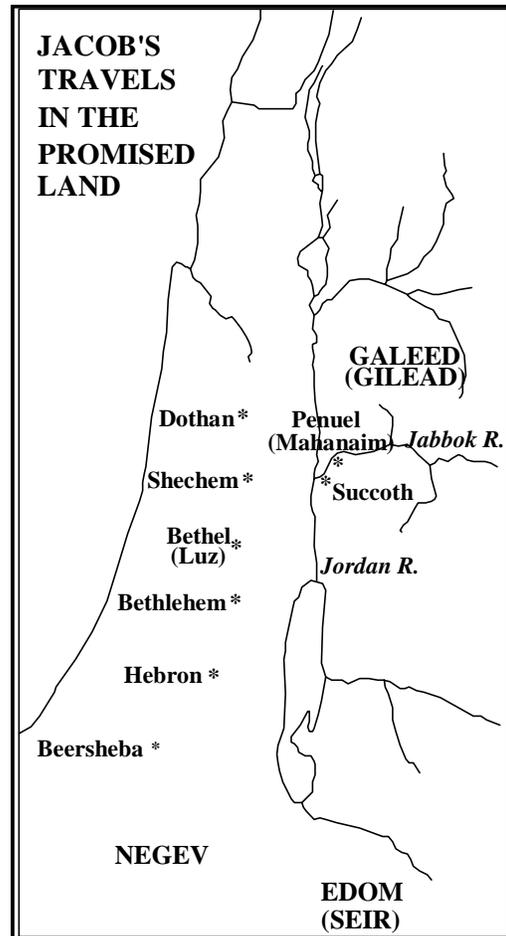
"By showing that the blessing was irrevocable, even by the father who gave the blessing, the writer underscores an important feature of the blessing—its fulfillment is out of human hands."⁷²⁹

Perhaps Isaac did not withdraw the blessing he had given Jacob because he realized that God had overruled his carnal preference for Esau (vv. 39-40).

Isaac's prophecy to Esau was no true blessing. At best he introduced a disturbing element into the blessing he had given Jacob because Jacob had used deception to obtain it.

The mountains of Edom are some of the most desolate and barren of any on earth today. They stand to the southeast of the Dead Sea. Esau's descendants would subsist by hunting people, just as Esau had subsisted by hunting game.

The Edomites served, revolted from, and were conquered by the Israelites repeatedly during their history. Saul defeated them after they enjoyed a long period of independence (1 Sam. 14:47). Then David made them his vassals (2 Sam. 8:14). They tried to revolt under Solomon but were unsuccessful (1 Kings 9:14 ff.). The Edomites were subject to Judah until King Joram's reign when they rebelled successfully. In Amaziah's reign Judah again subjugated them (2 Kings 14:7). They finally achieved permanent freedom from Judah during Ahaz's reign (2 Kings



⁷²⁸See A. C. Thiselton, "The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS25:2 (October 1972):294.

⁷²⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 191.

16:6). John Hyrcanus conquered Edom about 129 B.C., forced the Edomites to submit to circumcision, and incorporated them into the Jewish nation. Later through Antipater and Herod they established the Idumean dynasty over Judah that lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The writing prophets sometimes used the Edomites as the epitome of Israel's enemies.

Rebekah feared the loss of both her sons as a result of her plot (v. 45). Esau might have killed Jacob, and Esau then might have fled or the avenger of blood might have slain him (cf. 9:6).

27:46—28:5 Rebekah used her dislike for Esau's wives as an excuse to gain Isaac's permission for Jacob to go to Paddan-aram.⁷³⁰ Evidently Rebekah had kept Esau's hatred for Jacob from his aged father because she believed Isaac was near death (v. 41). Rebekah's deceit secured the blessing for Jacob, but resulted in his having to flee from his home. Rebekah never saw him again.

"... her broaching the subject of Jacob's marriage was a masterstroke: it played equally on Isaac's self-interest and his principles. The prospect of a third Hittite daughter-in-law and a distracted wife would have unmanned even an Abraham."⁷³¹

"Rebekah's manipulative language to spare Jacob again displays the poverty of Isaac and Rebekah's relationship. As demonstrated by the previous deception, Isaac and Rebekah do not seem able to communicate honestly with one another on important spiritual matters."⁷³²

Isaac evidently realized that his desire to give the blessing to Esau was not God's will, so having given it to Jacob (27:27-29) he blessed him further (28:1-4).⁷³³

This account is another remarkable demonstration of God's ability to use the sins of men and women to accomplish His purposes and at the same time punish the sinners for their sins.

"What man intends for evil God utilizes for good."⁷³⁴

Many years later the aged Jacob blessed Joseph's younger son Ephraim rather than his older brother Manasseh (48:14-19). He must have remembered how he had deceived his

⁷³⁰Paddan-aram was the area around Haran. See the map "Abraham's Travels Outside the Promised Land" under my comments on 11:27-32 for its location.

⁷³¹Kidner, p. 157.

⁷³²Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 382.

⁷³³Concerning Isaac's desire that Jacob marry someone from outside the Promised Land, see the note at 24:3-4.

⁷³⁴Davis, p. 238.

father Isaac to get his blessing. Joseph's approach to Jacob on that occasion was honorable by contrast, and his life was free of the consequences of deceit. This was not true of Jacob's life.

Jacob reaped what he sowed (Gal. 6:7). Laban later deceived him, and later still his own sons (in the case of the sale of Joseph) did so even more cruelly than he deceived Isaac.⁷³⁵

Esau's further marriages 28:6-9

Esau sought to obtain his parents' approval by marrying one of Abraham's descendants.

However "he failed to consider that Ishmael had been separated from the house of Abraham and family of promise by the appointment of God; so that it only furnished another proof that he had no thought of the religious interests of the chosen family and was unfit to be the recipient of divine revelation."⁷³⁶

This great story teaches that when God's people know His will they should not resort to deceptive, manipulative schemes to attain spiritual success but must pursue God's will righteously. Every member of Isaac's family behaved in a self-centered and unprincipled manner, yet God graciously overcame their sins. This reminds us that His mercy is the ultimate ground of salvation.

6. Jacob's vision at Bethel 28:10-22

Yahweh appeared at the top of an angel-filled stairway restating the promise to Abraham and adding more promises of blessing and protection for Jacob. The patriarch acknowledged God's presence, memorialized the place with a monument stone and a name, and vowed to worship the Lord there if He did bless and protect him.

"The two most significant events in the life of Jacob were nocturnal theophanies. The first was this dream at Bethel when he was fleeing from the land of Canaan, which ironically was his by virtue of the blessing. The other was his fight at Peniel when he was attempting to return to the land. Each divine encounter was a life-changing event."⁷³⁷

28:10-17 The "ladder" (v. 12, Heb. *sullam*) evidently resembled a stairway or ramp. Some interpreters take it as an allusion to a ziggurat while others believe it refers to the slope or ascent of the mountain of Bethel.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁵For some helpful insights into Jacob's character, see R. Paul Stevens, "Family Feud," *His* 42:3 (December 1981):18-20.

⁷³⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 1:281.

⁷³⁷Allen P. Ross, "Jacob's Visions: The Founding of Bethel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:567 (July-September 1985):226. Bethel receives more mention in the Old Testament than any other city but Jerusalem. This indicates its importance in biblical history.

⁷³⁸See C. Houtman, "What Did Jacob See In His Dream At Bethel?" *Vetus Testamentum* 27:3 (July 1977):337-51.

"The ladder was a visible symbol of the real and uninterrupted fellowship between God in heaven and His people upon earth. The angels upon it carry up the wants of men to God, and bring down the assistance and protection of God to men. The ladder stood there upon the earth, just where Jacob was lying in solitude, poor, helpless, and forsaken by men. Above in heaven stood Jehovah, and explained in words the symbol which he saw. Proclaiming Himself to Jacob as the God of his fathers, He not only confirmed to him all the promises of the fathers in their fullest extent, but promised him protection on his journey and a safe return to his home (vers. 13-15). But as the fulfillment of this promise to Jacob was still far off, God added the firm assurance, 'I will not leave thee till I have done (carried out) what I have told thee.'"⁷³⁹

This was God's first revelation to Jacob, and it came in a dream (cf. John 1:51). Other passages contain promises of the land (12:7; 13:14-16; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7), but this one (vv. 13-14) is closest in terminology to the one in chapter 13, another Bethel setting.

Jacob was the second person in the Bible to hear the assurance "I am with you" (v. 15).⁷⁴⁰ It was a promise that God later repeated to Moses (Exod. 3:12; Joshua (Josh. 1:5), Gideon (Judg. 6:16), regarding Immanuel (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), and to all Christians (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

Perhaps God's revelation surprised Jacob because he was preparing to leave the Promised Land (vv. 16-17). He may have felt that God would abandon him since he was leaving the land that God had promised his forefathers.

The "house of God" (v. 17, Bethel) is the place where God dwells. The "gate of heaven" is the place where Jacob entered heaven (in his dream).

"The term 'fear' is used in the Bible to describe a mixture of terror and adoration, a worshipful fear (cf. Exod. 19:16)."⁷⁴¹

"As Abraham's vision anticipated narratives from the latter part of the Pentateuch, so Jacob's vision anticipated the events which were to come in the next several chapters."⁷⁴²

⁷³⁹Keil and Delitzsch, 1:281-82.

⁷⁴⁰Isaac was the first (cf. 26:3, 24).

⁷⁴¹Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 491.

⁷⁴²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 193.

28:18-22 Jacob set the stone up as a memorial to this revelation and God's promise (v. 18). Pouring oil on it constituted an act of consecration. Jacob did not build an altar in response to God's revelation, as his forefathers had done.

Jacob vowed to convert his pillar into an altar if God would fulfill His promise (v. 15). He swore that Yahweh would be his God if God proved faithful to him. Jacob's vow (vv. 20-21; cf. 31:13; 35:1-3, 7) can be translated "Since . . ." rather than "If . . ." This was probably not as crass a bargain as it appears to have been. Jacob was apparently a believer in Yahweh already, but his commitment to God at this time appears to have been somewhat selfish and conditional. He had not yet fully surrendered and dedicated himself to God.⁷⁴³

"The assurance of God's presence should bring about in every believer the same response of worship and confidence it prompted in Jacob. This is the message from the beginning: God by grace visits His people and promises them protection and provision so that they might be a blessing to others. They in turn were to respond in faith, fearing Him, worshiping Him, offering to Him, vowing to Him, and making memorials for future worshipers at such places."⁷⁴⁴

Jacob's relationship with Yahweh was quite different from what Abraham or Isaac's relationship had been. He was willing to accept God's promises, but he did not commit himself to God until God proved faithful to him personally. God blessed Jacob because of God's election and Abraham and Isaac's faith more than because of Jacob's faith at this time.

Many believers bargain with God as Jacob did here. They agree to worship Him on their terms rather than because God has proven Himself faithful in the past. God often accommodates such weak faith, but the fact that He does does not commend the practice of bargaining with God.

The revelation of God's presence and promised blessings inspires genuine worship. This worship is the appropriate response to such revelation.

7. Jacob's marriages and Laban's deception 29:1-30

The long account of Jacob's relationship with Laban (chs. 29—31) is the centerpiece of the Jacob story (chs. 25—35). It is a story within a story, and it too has a chiasmic structure. At its center is the account of the birth of Jacob's sons, the forefathers of the tribes of Israel (29:31-35).

⁷⁴³On tithing, see the note on 14:20.

⁷⁴⁴Ross, "Genesis," p. 75.

Jacob met Rachel at the well and watered the flocks in spite of opposition against doing so. His love for her led him to serve Laban for seven years to obtain her as his wife. Laban deceived Jacob into marrying Leah, the first-born, so Jacob had to work another seven years for Rachel.

"In Laban Jacob met his match and his means of discipline."⁷⁴⁵

"Jacob is now in the greatest of all schools, that of experience, and there are many lessons to learn. These three chapters (xxix-xxxi.) cover forty years [*sic*, probably twenty years] of his life, and are the record of a large part of his training."⁷⁴⁶

29:1-12 "More than any other book in the OT, Genesis emphasizes the east (see 3:24; 4:16; 10:30; 11:2; 13:11; 25:6 [and 29:1]) as a direction of some significance."⁷⁴⁷

Jacob had travelled about 450 miles from Beersheba to Haran (v. 4). Notice the absence of prayer for divine guidance to the woman of God's choosing, which dominates the story of Abraham's servant's visit to the same area for the same purpose (ch. 22). Also, Jacob arrived alone on foot whereas Abraham's servant came with a well-laden camel train.

The well was probably a cistern that had a mouth with a large circumference (v. 8). A very large stone that required several men to remove it evidently covered it. After someone moved the stone, the flocks would gather around the edge of the well to drink. The well from which Rebekah drew water for Eliezer (24:16) was apparently a different kind.

The male shepherds may have been unable to roll the stone away because the well belonged to Laban; their inability may have been moral rather than physical.⁷⁴⁸

Jacob wept for joy (v. 11), but he did not praise God. He had ended his journey, was now in the right place, and had met the right person, he thought. This is one of the few places in Scripture that we read of a man kissing a woman. Jacob acted solely on the basis of Rachel's physical attractiveness.

"This scene [29:1-14] is chiefly about God's providence versus Jacob's prayerlessness . . ."⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁵Kidner, p. 159.

⁷⁴⁶Thomas, p. 269. Cf. Exod. 2:16-21.

⁷⁴⁷Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 252.

⁷⁴⁸Bush, 2:116-17.

⁷⁴⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 402.

The suggestion of some interpreters that Laban adopted Jacob as his son is questionable.⁷⁵⁰

29:13-20 Weak eyes were dull and lacking in luster rather than bright (v. 17). Fiery eyes were, and still are, considered the height of beauty among Near Eastern people.⁷⁵¹

"Regarding marriage generally, the Nuzi tablets provided that if a man worked over a period of time for the father of a girl whom he wished to marry, then he would have the right to take the girl as his wife."⁷⁵²

"*Seven years* was a handsome offer: Jacob was clearly not risking a refusal—a fact which Laban would not fail to note and exploit, as Jacob had exploited Esau's eagerness (25:32)."⁷⁵³

Casual laborers received between one-half and one shekel a month in old Babylonia, which was a large marriage gift in exchange for Rachel's hand.⁷⁵⁴

The chiasmic structure of verses 20-30 focuses attention on the complication caused by deception.

- "A Jacob's payment for his wife (20)
- B Consummation of the marriage to Leah by deception (21-24)
- C Jacob's accusation against Laban (25)
- C' Laban's defense (26)
- B' Consummation of the marriage to Rachel by negotiation (27-30a)
- A' Jacob's payment for his wife (30b)."⁷⁵⁵

29:21-30 "This was about one of the meanest pranks ever played on a man."⁷⁵⁶

Jacob had pretended to be his older brother, and now Leah pretended to be her younger sister. Leah deceived Jacob as Jacob had deceived Isaac. Perhaps Jacob's eating and drinking at the feast had clouded his mind (v. 22). The darkness of his tent at night may have made it hard for him to

⁷⁵⁰See John Van Seters, "Jacob's Marriages and Ancient Near East Customs: A Reexamination," *Harvard Theological Review* 62:4 (October 1969):377-95.

⁷⁵¹Keil and Delitzsch, 1:285; von Rad, p. 291.

⁷⁵²West, p. 70.

⁷⁵³Kidner, p. 160.

⁷⁵⁴G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, eds. and trans., *The Babylonian Laws*, 1:470-71.

⁷⁵⁵Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 498.

⁷⁵⁶Leupold, 2:795.

see, too.⁷⁵⁷ Furthermore, in that culture a bride customarily entered her husband's presence veiled.⁷⁵⁸ One year an Indian student of mine told me that his father did not see his mother's face for three days after their wedding. It is still customary among some Indians for the bride to remain veiled even after the consummation of the marriage.⁷⁵⁹

It was customary for the bride's father to give her a large present when she got married, a dowry. In the ancient world the gift normally consisted of clothing, furniture, and money, and it served as a nest egg for the wife in case her husband died or divorced her. Some dowries were exceptionally valuable, such as slave-girls (24:61; 29:29) or a city (1 Kings 9:16). Laban was being generous.⁷⁶⁰

As Jacob had deceived Isaac by taking advantage of his inability to see due to poor eyesight, so Laban deceived Jacob by taking advantage of his inability to see in the dark tent.

Earlier Jacob had deceptively pretended to be the older brother (ch. 27), and now Laban tricked him by replacing the younger with the older sister. Laban was just as deceitful as Jacob (v. 26).

"For despicability Laban takes the prize in the Old Testament."⁷⁶¹

He should have told Jacob of this custom beforehand if indeed it was a custom, which seems questionable.

The "bridal week" was the week of feasting that followed a marriage (v. 27; cf. Judg. 14:12, 17). Jacob received Rachel seven days after he had consummated his marriage to Leah (cf. vv. 28, 30).⁷⁶² Jacob married two women in eight days. Notice that Jacob was behaving like his parents, who each favored one son above the other, by favoring one of his wives above the other. In both cases serious family problems followed.

The Mosaic Law later prohibited marrying two sisters at the same time (Lev. 18:18). Bigamy and polygamy were never God's will, however (2:24).⁷⁶³

⁷⁵⁷Josephus, 1:19:6-7.

⁷⁵⁸S. R. Driver, *Genesis*, p. 271. Von Rad, p. 291, wrote "heavily veiled," and Aalders, p. 115, "completely veiled."

⁷⁵⁹See also J. A. Diamond, "The Deception of Jacob: A New Perspective on an Ancient Solution to the Problem," *Vetus Testamentum* 34:2 (April 1984):211-13.

⁷⁶⁰Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 236. Cf. West, p. 70.

⁷⁶¹Leupold, 2:798.

⁷⁶²The Hebrew name "Rachel" means "ewe," and "Leah" means "cow." Ironically, Laban treated them as cattle and used them for bargaining and trading. "Zilpah" means "small nose," and "Bilhah" means "carefree."

⁷⁶³See Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 249.

"Jacob had planned to take Rachel as his wife, but God intended him to have Leah."⁷⁶⁴

God remains faithful to His promises to bless His people, but in the process He may discipline them for their previous unresolved sins and often does so in kind (i.e., with talionic judgment; cf. Prov. 3:12; Gal. 6:7; Heb. 12:5-6).⁷⁶⁵

"Jacob was getting what he deserved. In this light the seven extra years that Jacob had to serve Laban appear as a repayment for his treatment of Esau. By calling such situations to the attention of the reader, the writer begins to draw an important lesson from these narratives. Jacob's deceptive schemes for obtaining the blessing did not meet with divine approval. Through Jacob's plans God's will had been accomplished; but the writer is intent on pointing out, as well, that the schemes and tricks were not of God's design."⁷⁶⁶

8. Jacob's mishandling of God's blessing 29:31—30:24

God formed Jacob's family, the ancestors of the tribes of Israel, as He had promised Jacob at Bethel. Unfortunately Jacob and his wives lived in envy and friction over how God chose to bless them. The real issue of the two sisters' conflicts in this pericope is the same as that of the brothers Esau and Jacob's struggle. Who will take the lead and be first, and who will have to serve?"

"Jacob had planned to take Rachel as his wife, but God intended him to have Leah. Thus in two major reversals in Jacob's life, we can begin to see the writer's theme taking shape. Jacob sought to marry Rachel, but Laban tricked him. Then Jacob sought to build a family through Rachel, but she was barren; and God opened Leah's womb."⁷⁶⁷

This record of Jacob's children, the center of the Jacob story structurally, is important for at least three reasons.

1. It shows God's faithfulness in providing descendants as He had promised.

"Now the account centers on the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to be with Jacob and to bless him."⁷⁶⁸

2. It gives the origins and circumstances surrounding the births of the tribal heads of Israel.

⁷⁶⁴Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 195.

⁷⁶⁵For a fascinating narration of this story in expanded form, see Thomas Mann, "Jacob Takes a Bride," *Bible Review* (Spring 1986):53-59, which is an excerpt from Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers*.

⁷⁶⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 199.

⁷⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁷⁶⁸Leupold, 2:800.

"The *theme* of the Pentateuch is not difficult to discern. It is the story of the birth and adolescence of a nation."⁷⁶⁹

3. It explains much of the tribal rivalry that follows in Israel's history.

The section culminates with the birth of Joseph (30:24), which was the cue for Jacob to return home (30:25).

29:31-35 Moses recorded the births of Leah's first four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. When the clause "the LORD saw" occurs (v. 31), His acting decisively, often for the weak and oppressed, follows soon (cf. 6:5; 7:1; 18:21; 31:12; Exod. 2:25; 4:31).

30:1-8 Rachel's reaction to her barrenness and Jacob's response contrast with how Rebekah and Isaac, and Sarah and Abraham behaved in similar circumstances. Sarah resorted to a custom acceptable in her culture, though contrary to God's will, to secure an heir for Abraham (cf. 16:1-2). Isaac prayed that God would open Rebekah's womb and waited (25:21). Rachel and Jacob followed the example of Sarah and Abraham.

The conflict between Rachel and Leah focuses on love and motherhood. Rachel had Jacob's love, but she could not become a mother. Conversely Leah was the mother of Jacob's children, but she could not win his love.⁷⁷⁰

The account of the birth of Bilhah's sons, Dan and Naphtali, follows (vv. 5-8).

30:9-13 Zilpah, Leah's maid, bore Jacob two sons: Gad and Asher.

"The terms *wife* and *concubine* are used more loosely in the patriarchal period. Three women in the patriarchal period are called both *wife* and *concubine*: Hagar (Gen. 16:3; 25:6 indirectly), Keturah (25:1; cf. 25:6; 1 Chron. 1:32), and Bilhah (Gen. 30:4; 35:22). Each of these concubines is an auxiliary wife to the patriarch, not a slave, but subordinate to the wife who is her mistress. After the patriarchal period, the term *wife* is never used as a synonym for concubine. Zilpah, though never called a concubine (cf. 30:9), has the same social position as Bilhah (cf. 37:2)."⁷⁷¹

30:14-20 The mandrake is a plant that bears bluish flowers in winter and yellowish plum-size fruit in summer. The fruit has a strong, pleasant fragrance, and

⁷⁶⁹Whybray, p. 9.

⁷⁷⁰Samuel Dresner, "Rachel and Leah: Sibling Tragedy or the Triumph of Piety and Compassion?" *Bible Review* 6:2 (April 1990):25.

⁷⁷¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 411.

was thought to help barren women conceive. Some Arabs still use it as an aphrodisiac (cf. Song of Sol. 7:13).⁷⁷²

"The outcome was ironical, the mandrakes doing nothing for Rachel, while Leah gained another son by parting with them."⁷⁷³

"Just as Jacob had purchased the birthright for a pot of stew (25:29-34), so also Leah purchased the right to more children by Jacob with the mandrakes of her son Reuben (30:14-16)."⁷⁷⁴

"'Sleep' (*skb*), as a euphemism for sex, is never used for loving marital intercourse in this book, only for illicit or forced sex: Lot's daughters with Lot (19:32-35); the Philistines with Rebekah (26:10); Shechem with Dinah (34:2, 7); Reuben with Bilhah (35:22); Potiphar's wife with Joseph (39:7, 10, 12, 14)."⁷⁷⁵

Leah received her other children, Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah, because "God gave heed to Leah" (v. 17), not because of some magic supposedly connected with the mandrakes.

Jacob may have had daughters besides Dinah (cf. 37:35 and 46:7). She may be the only one mentioned by name because she is the only one whose experience Moses recorded later in Genesis (ch. 34).

30:22-24 God eventually granted Rachel a son, Joseph. He was born at the end of Jacob's fourteenth year in Laban's service.

The jealousy, bickering, superstition, and weak faith demonstrated by Jacob and his wives stand out in this section. God's gift of children was gracious; He gave them in spite of, rather than because of, the behavior of the parents. Rachel acknowledged this finally (vv. 23-24) as did Jacob. The use of the names "Elohim" and "Yahweh" reflects the attitudes of the various characters to God and shows their relationships with Him.

"On the human plane the story demonstrates the craving of human beings for love and recognition, and the price of thwarting it; on the divine level it shows once again the grace of God choosing difficult and unpromising material."⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷²von Rad, p. 295.

⁷⁷³Kidner, p. 162.

⁷⁷⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 201.

⁷⁷⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 413.

⁷⁷⁶Kidner, p. 161.

"Jacob's partiality and his general handling of his family led to strife and mother groupings that were to affect the history of Israel for centuries thereafter."⁷⁷⁷

Believers should not envy and strive, which leads to bitter conflicts, but should obey God trusting Him to dispense His blessings wisely, justly, and compassionately.

The actions of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah in this chapter, and those of Abraham and Sarah in chapter 16, raise questions about surrogate parenting. Today husbands and wives who cannot have children normally sometimes choose to secure the services of a third person who can provide a needed function and thus enable them to have children. For example, if the wife cannot carry a baby in her womb for a full term pregnancy some doctors recommend that the couple use the services of another woman. If acceptable, they implant the couple's fertilized egg in her womb that she agrees to "rent" for the nine-month gestation period. Another example is the securing of sperm from a donor if the husband is sterile. There are many ways in which childless couples can now become parents with this kind of help from a third, and sometimes fourth party. These situations are somewhat similar to what we find in Genesis 16 and 30. The common tie is that in all these cases someone other than the husband and wife is essential to the conception of the child. I do not believe that adoption is similar because in adoption a husband and wife simply agree to rear a child that has been or will be born. They do not require a third party for the conception of the child as in surrogate parenting.

9. Jacob's new contract with Laban 30:25-43

Jacob and Laban ("White") made an agreement that each man felt he could manipulate to his own advantage. However, God sovereignly overruled to bless Jacob as He had promised in spite of Laban's deceit and Jacob's devices (cf. Job 5:13; Ps. 7:15; 1 Cor. 3:19).

As the previous pericope shows how Yahweh provided descendants for Jacob as He had promised (seed), this one demonstrates how He made Jacob wealthy (blessing). In both cases God acted in spite of and independent of the bickering, superstition, deceit, and disobedience of Jacob and his wives.

"By crossing the heterozygotes among themselves, Jacob would produce, according to the laws of heredity, twenty-five percent spotted sheep. Thus he multiplies his flock. Jacob has displayed ingenuity; he has not practiced deception.

"Jacob's knowledge of zoology is far from primitive. But perhaps such knowledge has been given him by God, just as his son's capacity to interpret dreams was a gift from God."⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁷H. Vos, p. 113.

⁷⁷⁸Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 284. Cf. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 212; Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 257.

Jacob was evidently relying on a popular superstition, namely, that certain experiences of the mother during pregnancy influenced the condition of her offspring, to mislead Laban (vv. 37-39). At least one writer thought that Jacob was mistakenly counting on this custom to insure fertility among his flocks.

"All marking of the offspring such as that which Jacob thought he was accomplishing in Laban's flocks, is completely impossible. . . . In the placenta and umbilical cord, which constitutes the only connection between the mother and the fetus, there are *no nerves*. . . . Thus, absolutely no mechanism exists whereby the mother can mark her offspring in the way that Jacob thought he was accomplishing the marking."⁷⁷⁹

Whether Jacob was very smart or very superstitious, the success of Jacob's plan was due to the grace of God ultimately (cf. 31:10-12).

"As with many of the tricks which Jacob attempts in these narratives, God blessed Jacob in spite of them, not because of or through them."⁷⁸⁰

The herdsmen believed the stronger members of the flock mated in the summer and the weaker in the fall (vv. 41-42).⁷⁸¹

Jacob's behavior was devious in that he sought to prosper at the expense of his employer. The text records that Jacob became very wealthy (v. 43), but it does not say that his wealth was a blessing from God. Jacob made his own fortune, but the text says that God made Abraham rich. God allowed Jacob to become wealthy through his own toil and deception. God probably would have done more for Jacob than he could have done for himself if Jacob had placed himself under God's authority.

The lesson of this section is that people who experience God's material blessing need to acknowledge that it comes from Him rather than from their own abilities.

10. Jacob's flight from Haran ch. 31

Laban's hostility and his wives' encouragement motivated Jacob to return to Canaan. When Laban overtook Jacob in Gilead, Jacob defended his own actions and accused Laban of deceit. This silenced Laban and led him to request a peace treaty with Jacob.

Jacob's departure for Canaan 31:1-21

God had been faithful in blessing Jacob as He had promised Abraham and Isaac. Moses recorded the testimony to that fact in this section. Jacob acknowledged that God was

⁷⁷⁹Frank L. Marsh, *Studies in Creationism*, pp. 368-69.

⁷⁸⁰Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 196.

⁷⁸¹See Martha A. Morrison, "The Jacob and Laban Narrative in Light of Near Eastern Sources," *Biblical Archaeologist* 46:3 (Summer 1983):155-64, which contains many helpful explanations of herding practices, contracts involving herding, marriage customs, and the significance of household gods.

responsible for his prosperity. God's goodness and His command to return to the Promised Land (v. 3), as well as Laban's growing hostility (v. 5), motivated Jacob to leave Paddan-aram.

It is unclear from what Jacob reported to his wives when the Angel of God appeared to him in the dream (vv. 10-13). This may have occurred before or at the same time as the revelation referred to earlier in this passage. It seems likely, however, that this was the same revelation, God's second to Jacob.

In this revelation Jacob learned that God had been responsible for his becoming richer (v. 12). Jacob credited God with this and with his own survival (vv. 5, 7). This is the first time in the narrative that Jacob emerges as a man of public faith. He finally takes the leadership in his home, and his wives, for the first time, follow his lead.

The increasing antagonism of Laban's household encouraged Jacob to obey God's command to return to the Promised Land (vv. 1-2).

31:1-16 "The true character of Laban is clearly seen from the fact that his daughters entirely sided with Jacob against their own father They too had experienced their father's selfishness and greed, and were ready to approve of their husband's project and to go with him."⁷⁸²

31:17-21 "Rachel's theft of her father's idols [teraphim] . . . reflects the Hurrian custom of keeping household gods. . . . Nevertheless, the real significance of what she did, and perhaps the reason for the theft, lies in the fact that according to the Nuzi tablets he who possessed the household gods was the legitimate heir."⁷⁸³

Other writers, however, dispute this significance of the household gods at this time, as well as Rachel's motivation.

"The supposed role of the teraphim . . . as constituting the title-deeds to inheritances . . . seems also to be fallacious; Rachel simply took them for her own protection and blessing."⁷⁸⁴

These gods were usually small figurines (two to three inches long), sometimes carried on the body as charms, many of which archaeologists have discovered. They may have represented departed ancestors or gods

⁷⁸²Thomas, p. 285.

⁷⁸³West, p. 70.

⁷⁸⁴Kitchen, *The Bible* . . . , p. 70. Cf. Barker, p. 135.

that their makers venerated.⁷⁸⁵ Rachel may also have hoped they would make her a fruitful mother.⁷⁸⁶

"It is curious that Rachel, and not Leah should have almost always turned out to be Jacob's greatest hindrance in life."⁷⁸⁷

The writer identified Jacob's deception as such when he fled from Paddan-aram (v. 20).

Laban's confrontation with Jacob 31:22-55

God had promised to be with Jacob and to return him to Canaan (28:15). We see God doing this, in spite of Laban's opposition, in this section.

"It was only by divine prospering and protection (24) that Jacob brought anything, even his life, back from exile."⁷⁸⁸

31:22-42 God revealed Himself to people other than the patriarchs in these days (v. 29; cf. Abimelech in 20:3).

"Jacob and Rachel are again two of a kind. This time both almost bring ruin on the family by their risk taking: she by her rash theft, he by his rash vow ([v. 32] cf. his sons' rash vow in 44:6-12)."⁷⁸⁹

The teraphim were already nothing gods, but they became unclean and suffered humiliation when Rachel, who claimed to be unclean, sat on them while menstruating (vv. 34-35; cf. Lev. 15:20).

Under traditional ancient Near Eastern law, a shepherd was not held responsible for losses to his master's flocks due to attacking wild beasts and, in some cases, thieves.⁷⁹⁰ Yet Jacob had borne these losses (v. 39). Laban had cheated Jacob.

"God has corked the bottle of his [Laban's] aggressiveness."⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁵See Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 273.

⁷⁸⁶See M. Greenberg, "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962):247; Harry A. Hoffner Jr., "The Linguistic Origins of Teraphim," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1967):230-38; and Gerhard Mehlman, "Genesis 31:19-39: An Interpretation," *Journal of Reform Judaism* 29:3 (Summer 1982):33-36.

⁷⁸⁷Thomas, p. 285.

⁷⁸⁸Kidner, p. 165.

⁷⁸⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 430.

⁷⁹⁰Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 277.

⁷⁹¹Fokkelman, p. 166.

"Each of the three patriarchs had to be ingloriously extricated from some adventure."⁷⁹²

Jacob believed that he was innocent until proved guilty, but Laban felt he was guilty until proved innocent. "The fear of Isaac" (vv. 42, 53) is the God whom Isaac feared. Jacob's words in verse 42 summarize his whole life in Harran.

31:43-55 Jacob and Laban made a parity covenant, set up a stone pillar (Heb. *misbah*, standing stone) to mark the spot, and ate a meal together as part of the rite involved in establishing a covenant (vv. 44-48). They may have erected the heap of stones (Heb. *gal*, cairn, v. 46) both as a table for the meal and as a memorial of the event.⁷⁹³

Galeed ("witness heap," v. 47) is the name from which Gilead came. Gilead became a common name for this mountainous area east of the Jordan River between the Sea of Galilee (Cinnereth, Hebrew for "lyre" denoting the shape of the lake) and the Dead (Salt) Sea (cf. vv. 21, 23, 25).

The so-called "Mizpah [lit. watchtower] blessing" was not really a promise between friends but a warning between antagonists who did not trust each other (v. 49). They called on God to keep each other true to the terms of the covenant they had just made. They could not check on each other themselves.

"This covenant also might be called a nonaggression pact."⁷⁹⁴

"It is impossible to avoid noticing the curious misconception of the term 'mizpah' which characterizes its use today. As used for a motto on rings, Christmas cards, and even as the title of an organization, it is interpreted to mean union, trust, fellowship; while its original meaning was that of separation, distrust, and warning. Two men, neither of whom trusted the other, said in effect: 'I cannot trust you out of my sight. The Lord must be the watchman between us if we and our goods are to be kept safe from each other.'"⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹²Kidner, p. 165. Note the similarity between Jacob's escape from Laban and his descendants' escape from Egypt in the Exodus.

⁷⁹³Standing stones sometimes marked supposed dwelling places of the gods (cf. 28:17-18), and cairns often marked graves (cf. Josh. 7:26; 8:29; 2 Sam. 18:17).

⁷⁹⁴H. Vos, p. 122.

⁷⁹⁵Thomas, p. 287.

Laban had two deities in mind when he said "The God of Abraham and the god of Nahor" (v. 53), as the Hebrew plural verb translated "judge" indicates. Jacob swore by the "Awesome One of Isaac," which indicates that he was worshipping the God of his fathers. Laban swore by the pagan god his fathers worshipped.

Those who are obediently following God's call and are experiencing His blessing can be confident that He will protect them.

11. Jacob's attempt to appease Esau 32:1-21

Chapters 32 and 33 can be viewed as one episode in the life of Jacob. They describe his return to the Promised Land including his meeting with Esau. There are thematic parallels between these chapters and chapter 31.

In spite of the vision of God's assisting messengers, Jacob divided his people into two groups as a precaution when he heard Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. Furthermore he sought to pacify Esau's anger with an expensive gift in addition to praying for God's deliverance.

Jacob had been able to handle his problems himself by hook or by crook until now. At this point in his experience God brought him to the end of his natural resources.

"The events of this chapter are couched between two accounts of Jacob's encounter with angels (vv. 1, 25). The effect of these two brief pictures of Jacob's meeting with angels on his return to the land is to align the present narrative with the similar picture of the Promised Land in the early chapters of Genesis. The land was guarded on its borders by angels. The same picture was suggested early in the Book of Genesis when Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden and 'cherubim' were positioned on the east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life. It can hardly be accidental that as Jacob returned from the east, he was met by angels at the border of the Promised Land. This brief notice may also be intended to alert the reader to the meaning of Jacob's later wrestling with the 'man' . . . at Peniel (vv. 25-30). The fact that Jacob had met with angels here suggests that the man at the end of the chapter is also an angel."⁷⁹⁶

32:1-2 These angels (messengers) must have resembled the angels Jacob had seen at Bethel (28:12) for him to have recognized them as angels. They joined his own company of travelers for Jacob's protection. This is the reason for the name "Mahanaim" (i.e., double host or double camp). Jacob probably saw the camp of angels as a source of comfort to his own camp as he prepared to enter the Promised Land.

32:3-12 Why did Jacob initiate contact with Esau (v. 3)?

⁷⁹⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 208.

"He knows that there can be no peace and quiet until his relations with Esau are assured and put on a proper footing. Not until that matter was settled could Jacob feel certain of his future."⁷⁹⁷

Esau may have had a large army because he had had to subjugate the Horite (Hurrian) population of Seir (v. 6). His soldiers probably consisted of his own servants plus the Canaanite and Ishmaelite relations of his wives.

Jacob's reaction to Esau's apparently hostile advance against him was to try to protect himself (vv. 7-8). This was Jacob's standard response to trouble. Yet this time he knew it would not be enough. So, he called on God for help (vv. 9-12). We need to be right with God before we can be right with our brothers.

Jacob's prayer (his first recorded prayer and the only extended prayer in Genesis) reflects his deeply felt need for God's help and his own humility (vv. 9-12).⁷⁹⁸ He reminded God of His past dealings with his forefathers and with himself (v. 9). He confessed his personal unworthiness and lack of any claim upon God's favor (v. 10). By calling himself "Thy servant" he became ready to serve others. He requested divine deliverance and acknowledged his own fear (v. 11). Finally he claimed God's promise of a continuing line of descendants (v. 12). This is an excellent model prayer.

32:13-21 Though he hoped for God's help, Jacob did not fail to do all he could to appease his brother (vv. 13-15). His magnanimous gifts aimed diplomatically to pacify his offended brother.

"As the narrative unfolds, however, it was not Jacob's plan that succeeded but his prayer. When he met with Esau, he found that Esau had had a change of heart. Running to meet Jacob, Esau embraced and kissed him and wept (33:4). All of Jacob's plans and schemes had come to naught. In spite of them all, God had prepared Jacob's way."⁷⁹⁹

Jacob's ability to give Esau 580 animals proves that God had made him enormously wealthy.

"Jacob's behavioral response was classically narcissistic."⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁷Thomas, p. 293. Cf. Matt. 5:23-25a.

⁷⁹⁸Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 443, likened its form to the "penitential psalms."

⁷⁹⁹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 209.

⁸⁰⁰Shepperson, p. 183.

In view of God's promises to them believers can pray with confidence for His deliverance and do not need to give away His provisions to appease their enemies.

12. Jacob at the Jabbok 32:22-32

"Hebrew narrative style often includes a summary statement of the whole passage followed by a more detailed report of the event. Here v. 22 is the summary statement, while v. 23 begins the detailed account."⁸⁰¹

This site was probably just a few miles east of the Jordan Valley (v. 22). The Jabbok joins the Jordan River about midway between the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee) and the Salt (Dead) Sea.⁸⁰²

It was when Jacob was alone, having done everything he could to secure his own safety, that God came to him (v. 24). An unidentified man assaulted Jacob, and he had to fight for his life. The "man" was the Angel of the Lord (vv. 28-30). Note that God took the initiative in wrestling with Jacob, not vice versa. God was bringing Jacob to the end of himself. He was leading him to a settled conviction that God was superior to him and that he must submit to God's leadership in his life (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

"The great encounter with God came when Jacob knew himself to be exposed to a situation wholly beyond him."⁸⁰³

This was not a vision or a dream, but a real event. The injury to Jacob's hip joint proves this. It was God's third revelation to Jacob.

Jacob's refusal to release the man indicates the sincerity of his felt need for God's help (v. 26; cf. John 15:5). Again Jacob demonstrated his strong desire for blessing.

"Jacob completed, by his wrestling with God, what he had already been engaged in even from his mother's womb, viz. his striving for the birthright; in other words, for the possession of the covenant promise and the covenant blessing To save him from the hand of his brother, it was necessary that God should first meet him as an enemy, and show him that his real opponent was God Himself, and that he must first of all overcome Him before he could hope to overcome his brother. And Jacob overcame God; not with the power of the flesh however, with which he had hitherto wrestled for God against man (God convinced him of that by touching his hip, so that it was put out of joint), but by the power of faith and prayer, reaching by firm hold of God even to the point of being blessed, by which he proved himself to be a true wrestler of God, who

⁸⁰¹The NET Bible note on 32:22.

⁸⁰²On the location and significance of the Jabbok River, see Bryant G. Wood, "Journey Down the Jabbok," *Bible and Spade* (Spring 1978):57-64.

⁸⁰³Kidner, p. 168.

fought with God and with men, i.e., who by his wrestling with God overcame men as well."⁸⁰⁴

By his wrestling with God Jacob began a new stage in his life (v. 28); he was a new man because he now began to relate to God in a way new for him. As a sign of this, God gave him a new name that indicated his new relationship to God. Israel means "God's warrior."

"The acknowledgment of the old name, and its unfortunate suitability [Jacob, v. 27], paves the way for the new name [Israel, v. 28]."⁸⁰⁵

". . . the name Israel denoted a spiritual state determined by faith; and in Jacob's life the natural state, determined by flesh and blood, still continued to stand side by side with this. Jacob's new name was transmitted to his descendants, however, who were called Israel as the covenant nation. For as the blessing of their forefather's conflict came down to them as a spiritual inheritance, so did they also enter upon the duty of preserving this inheritance by continuing in a similar conflict."⁸⁰⁶

"Elohim" occurs here to bring out the contrast between God and His creature. Jacob prevailed, in the sense of obtaining his request, by acknowledging his dependence and cleaving to God as his deliverer.

"The transformation pertains to the way in which Jacob prevails. Heretofore he prevailed over people by trickery. Now he prevails with God, and so with humans, by his words, not by the physical gifts conferred on him at birth or acquired through human effort."⁸⁰⁷

"One wonders if 'Why is it that you inquire about my name?' [v. 29] is another way of asking, 'Jacob, don't you realize who I am?'"⁸⁰⁸

Another view is that God withheld His name to heighten Jacob's awe at this great event and to impress the significance of the event on Jacob all the more.

Jacob believed that he had seen God face to face (v. 30). The ancients believed that anyone who saw God face to face would die (cf. Exod. 33:20; Judg. 13:21-22). He was probably also grateful that the Angel had not dealt with him more severely, as he deserved. "Peniel" sounds more like "face of God" in Hebrew than the more common Penuel.

The result of this spiritual crisis in Jacob's life was obvious to all who observed him from then on (v. 31). It literally resulted in a change in his walk.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁴Keil and Delitzsch, 1:305-6.

⁸⁰⁵Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 333.

⁸⁰⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 1:307.

⁸⁰⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 446.

⁸⁰⁸Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 336.

⁸⁰⁹See Harry Foster, "Walking with a Limp," *Toward the Mark* (September-October 1982):97-100.

"When God touched the strongest sinew of Jacob, the wrestler, it shriveled, and with it Jacob's persistent self-confidence."⁸¹⁰

Every Christian does not need to have this type of drastic experience. Abraham and Isaac did not. God has told us that we can do nothing without Him (John 15:5) and that we should believe Him. It is only when God's elect do not believe Him that He must teach us this lesson. Sometimes He has to bring us very low to do it. Every Christian should yield himself or herself to the lordship of God (Rom. 6:13, 19; 12:1-2).

"If only the swimmer yields to the water, the water keeps him up; but if he continues to struggle, the result is disastrous. Let us learn to trust, just as we learn to float."⁸¹¹

To become strong in faith the believer must forsake self-sufficiency.⁸¹²

13. Jacob's meeting with Esau and his return to Canaan ch. 33

Jacob was ready to sacrifice part of his family expecting Esau to attack him, and he approached his brother as though Esau was his lord. In contrast, Esau welcomed Jacob magnanimously, reluctantly received his gift, and offered to host him in Seir. Jacob declined Esau's offer and traveled instead to Succoth, four miles west of Peniel, where he settled next.

"As Jacob had won God's blessing by capitulating to Him, so now he was to win reconciliation to Esau by capitulating to him"⁸¹³

33:1-17 Jacob arranged his family to preserve those who were most precious to him if his brother proved to be violently hostile (vv. 1-3).

"This kind of ranking according to favoritism no doubt fed the jealousy over Joseph that later becomes an important element in the narrative. It must have been painful to the family to see that they were expendable."⁸¹⁴

His going ahead of them to meet Esau shows the new Israel overcoming the fear that had formerly dominated the old Jacob. His plan does not seem to me to reflect lack of trust in God as much as carefulness and personal

⁸¹⁰Allen P. Ross, "Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:568 (October-December 1985):350.

⁸¹¹Thomas, p. 298.

⁸¹²Stephen Geller concluded that "the narrative is presented in a deliberately enigmatic manner to channel the reader's imagination in certain directions" in "The Struggle at the Jabbok: The Uses of Enigma in a Biblical Narrative," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 14 (1982):39. See also Edward M. Curtis, "Structure, Style and Context as a Key to Interpreting Jacob's Encounter at Peniel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:2 (June 1987):129-37.

⁸¹³H. Vos, p. 125.

⁸¹⁴The NET Bible note on 33:2.

responsibility. However, Jacob was obviously fearful and weak as he anticipated meeting his brother. Faith does not mean trusting God to work for us in spite of our irresponsibility; that is presumption. Faith means trusting God to work for us when we have acted responsibly realizing that without His help we will fail. His insistence on giving presents to Esau may have been an attempt to return to him the blessing that should have been his, to undo his sins of earlier years (cf. v. 11).⁸¹⁵

Jacob gave God the glory for giving him his family; he confessed that his family was a gift from God (vv. 4-5). This attitude is evidence of a basic change in Jacob's approach to life.⁸¹⁶ Whereas he had previously been dishonest and devious, now he was honest and forthright about his intentions (v. 10).

"Now that they are reunited, Esau desires a fraternal relationship, but Jacob is unable to move beyond a formal relationship.

"Only the restraining intervention of God kept Laban from retaliation against Jacob (31:24, 29). Esau is apparently in no need of a similar divine check. His own good nature acts as a check on him. Since his rage and hate of ch. 27, Esau himself has undergone his own transformation. No longer is he controlled by vile passions."⁸¹⁷

"I see your face as one sees the face of God," means I see in your face, as expressive of your whole attitude toward me, the friendliness of God. I see this friendliness demonstrated in His making you friendly toward me (v. 10; cf. 1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam. 14:17). Jacob had seen God's gracious face and had been spared at Peniel, and he now saw Esau's gracious face and was spared.

Jacob's "language shows that he saw the two encounters with his Lord and his brother, as two levels of a single event: cf. 10b with 32:30."⁸¹⁸

Jacob's reasons for declining Esau's offer of an escort evidently did not spring from fear (vv. 14-15). He gave a legitimate explanation of why it would be better for him to travel separately: the condition of his animals. Jacob may have been counting on God's protection and therefore felt no need of Esau's men. Alternatively Jacob may have mistrusted Esau having

⁸¹⁵Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 298-99.

⁸¹⁶For some interesting insights into eastern behavior as reflected in verse 4, see Imad Shehadeh, "Contrasts between Eastern and Western Cultures," *Exegesis and Exposition* 2:1 (Summer 1987):3-12.

⁸¹⁷Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 345.

⁸¹⁸Kidner, p. 171. Cf. von Rad, pp. 327-28.

been deceived himself and having been deceptive.⁸¹⁹ Still another view is that Jacob was returning to the Promised Land on God's orders, and that did not include going to Seir.⁸²⁰

His reference to visiting Esau in Seir (v. 14) does not mean that Jacob planned to go directly to Seir, where he did not go immediately. He could have been deceiving his brother again. Perhaps Jacob meant that he would visit his brother in his own land in the future. Scripture does not record whether Jacob ever made such a trip.

Jacob and his family settled first at Succoth ("Booths") east of the Jordan River (v. 17). Evidently he lived there for some time since he built a house and huts for his livestock.

This incident illustrates the truth of Proverbs 16:7, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

"At almost every point in this story, Esau emerges as the more appealing, more humane, and more virtuous of the two brothers."⁸²¹

"This is only the second—and it is the last—conversation between Esau and Jacob mentioned in Genesis. On the first occasion (25:29-34) Esau failed to perceive Jacob's capacity for exploitation. On the second occasion he fails to perceive Jacob's hesitancy and lack of excitement about going to Seir. In both cases, Jacob succeeds in deceiving Esau."⁸²²

33:18-20 Jacob then crossed the Jordan River and moved his family into the land of Canaan. He chose Shechem ("peaceful") as his home. By purchasing land there he showed that he regarded Canaan as his permanent home and the home of his seed. The Israelites eventually buried Joseph at Shechem (Josh. 24:32). Shechem was only a mile or two from the Sychar of Jesus' day (cf. John 4:5, 12).

God had granted Jacob's request by bringing him safely back into the Promised Land (cf. 28:20-21). As he had vowed, Jacob worshipped the God of his father as his God. He called Yahweh "El-Elohe-Israel" meaning, "The mighty God is the God of Israel." Jacob used his own new name, Israel (32:29). He built an altar, Jacob's first, to worship God as

⁸¹⁹von Rad, p. 328.

⁸²⁰Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 299.

⁸²¹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 347.

⁸²²*Ibid.*, p. 348.

Abraham had done at Shechem when he had first entered Canaan (12:6-7). The altar would have served the double purpose of providing a table for Jacob's sacrifice and serving as a memorial for Jacob's descendants in the years to come.

What were Jacob's motivation and relationship to God when he met Esau? This question rises often in the study of this chapter. Some commentators have felt that Jacob completely backslid and returned to his former lifestyle of self-reliance and deceit.⁸²³ Most interpreters attribute good motives to Jacob.⁸²⁴ I believe the truth probably lies somewhere between these extremes. It seems to me that Jacob's experience at Peniel had a life-changing impact on him. Jacob seems to be referring to it in 33:10. Nevertheless his former lifestyle had become so ingrained—Jacob was over 90 years old at this time—that he easily slipped back into his former habits. I believe we have a clue to this in the use of his name "Jacob" in the text rather than "Israel." In short, Jacob seems to have had a genuine experience of coming to grips with himself and yielding his life to God at Peniel. Nevertheless from then on, his motives and attitudes vacillated. At times he trusted God as he should have, but at others, many others, he failed to trust God.

The divine Author's main concern in this section was not Jacob's motivation, however; He could have clarified this for us. Rather it seems to have been the faithfulness of God in sparing Jacob's life and returning him to the Promised Land as He had promised (28:13-15). The Jacob narrative also contains evidence that God was faithful to bless others through Abraham's descendants (12:3), including Laban (cf. 30:27) and Esau (cf. 33:11).

A major lesson of this chapter is that those who have received God's grace may trust in God's promise of protection when they seek reconciliation with others.

14. The rape of Dinah and the revenge of Simeon and Levi ch. 34

After Shechem the Canaanite raped Dinah, Simeon and Levi gained revenge by deceiving the Shechemites into being circumcised as the condition for Dinah's marriage. Then they murdered the incapacitated men of the city.

"Once again, as in the birth of his sons (29:31—30:24), Jacob's household is dysfunctional because of his passivity. His sons are rash and unbridled, and he is passive. No one in this story escapes censure."⁸²⁵

"The story is a tangled skein of good and evil, as are all the patriarchal narratives."⁸²⁶

Dinah must have been a teenager at this time.⁸²⁷

⁸²³E.g., Thomas, pp. 309-16.

⁸²⁴E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 1:307-11; Aalders, pp. 148-53.

⁸²⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 458.

⁸²⁶Ross, "Genesis," p. 83.

⁸²⁷Keil and Delitzsch, 1:311, calculated from other references in Genesis that she was between 13 and 15. Davis, p. 256, wrote that she was 15 or 16.

34:1-17 Moses used the name "Israel" here for the first time as a reference to God's chosen people (v. 7). The family of Jacob had a special relationship to God by divine calling reflected in the name "Israel" (prince with God). Therefore Shechem's act was an especially "disgraceful thing" having been committed against a member of the family with the unique vocation (cf. Deut. 22:21; Josh. 7:15; Judg. 20:10; 2 Sam. 13:12; et al.).

"What had happened to Dinah was considered by Jacob's family to be of the same nature as what later was known as 'a disgraceful thing in Israel' [i.e., rape]."⁸²⁸

As was customary in their culture, Jacob's sons took an active part in approving their sister's marriage (v. 13; cf. 24:50). They were correct in opposing the end in view: the mixing of the chosen seed with the seed of the Canaanites. Yet they were wrong in adopting the means they selected to achieve their end. In their deception they show themselves to be "chips off the old block," Jacob.

"Marriage was always preceded by betrothal, in which the bridegroom's family paid a *mhd* 'marriage present' to the bride's family (1 Sam 18:25). In cases of premarital intercourse, this still had to be paid to legitimize the union, and the girl's father was allowed to fix the size of the marriage present (Exod 22:15-16 [16-17]; limited by Deut 22:29 to a maximum of fifty shekels). . . . Here it seems likely that Shechem is offering both a 'marriage present' to Jacob and 'a gift' to Dinah."⁸²⁹

34:18-31 We can explain the agreement of the men of the city, including Hamor and Shechem (v. 18), to undergo circumcision. Other nations besides Jacob's family practiced this rite at this time as an act of consecration.⁸³⁰ Jacob was not suggesting that these men convert from one religion to another.⁸³¹ Normally circumcision was practiced on adults rather than on infants before God told Abraham to circumcise the infants born in his family (17:12-14).

It was "sometimes an initiation into marriageable status."⁸³²

Dinah, Simeon, and Levi were the children of Jacob and Leah, the unloved wife (v. 25). Simeon and Levi doubtless felt closer to Dinah than some of

⁸²⁸Aalders, p. 156.

⁸²⁹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 312-13.

⁸³⁰Keil and Delitzsch, 1:313-14.

⁸³¹J. Milgrom, "Religious Conversion and the Revolt Model for the Formation of Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982):173.

⁸³²Kidner, p. 174.

her other half-brothers did for this reason. Probably Jacob's indifference to Dinah's plight, evidenced by his lack of action, prompted the violent overreaction of her brothers.⁸³³

While Simeon and Levi took the lead in this atrocity, all of Jacob's sons evidently participated with them in the looting of the city (v. 27; cf. vv. 28-29).

Jacob's distress arose because of two facts (v. 30). His sons had committed murder and robbery, and his family had now broken a covenant, a very serious act in their society.

"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."⁸³⁴

Deception proceeded to murder and pillage. As a result of this sin Jacob passed over Simeon and Levi for the primary blessing (49:5-7). It went to Judah instead.

"The crafty character of Jacob degenerated into malicious cunning in Simeon and Levi; and jealousy for the exalted vocation of their family, into actual sin."⁸³⁵

"Of course, fear is natural in such a situation, but the reasons Jacob gives for damning his sons betray him. He does not condemn them for the massacre, for abusing the rite of circumcision, or even for breach of contract. Rather, he protests that the consequences of their action have made him unpopular. Nor does he seem worried by his daughter's rape or the prospect of intermarriage with the Canaanites. He is only concerned for his own skin."⁸³⁶

It is interesting that Simeon and Levi referred to Dinah as "our sister" (v. 31) rather than as Jacob's daughter, which would have been appropriate in addressing Jacob. This implies that since Jacob had not showed enough concern for Dinah her blood brothers felt compelled to act in her defense.

The significance of this chapter is fourfold at least.

1. It explains why Jacob passed over Simeon and Levi for the special blessing.

⁸³³Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 308-10.

⁸³⁴Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 371.

⁸³⁵Keil and Delitzsch, 1:315.

⁸³⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 316.

2. It shows the importance of keeping the chosen seed separate from the Canaanites.⁸³⁷

"The law [of Moses] said that Israel was not to intermarry with the Canaanites or make treaties with them but was to destroy them because they posed such a threat. This passage provides part of the rationale for such laws, for it describes how immoral Canaanites defiled Israel by sexual contact and attempted to marry for the purpose of swallowing up Israel."⁸³⁸

"People who live on the borderland between church and world are like those who lived in the old days on the borders between England and Scotland—they are never safe."⁸³⁹

3. It gives a reason for the sanctification of Jacob's household that follows (35:2-4).
4. It demonstrates the sovereign control of God.

"While the story in this chapter operates at a level of family honor and the brothers' concern for their ravaged sister, the story nevertheless also carries along the theme that runs so clearly through the Jacob narratives, namely, that God works through and often in spite of the limited self-serving plans of human beings. The writer's purpose is not to approve these human plans and schemes but to show how God, in his sovereign grace, could still achieve his purpose through them."⁸⁴⁰

Younger zealots such as Simeon and Levi may bring reproach on God's covenant through their misguided zeal. This may happen when spiritual leaders such as Jacob are indifferent to pagan defilement and fail to act decisively against it.⁸⁴¹

". . . this story shows Jacob's old nature reasserting itself, a man whose moral principles are weak, who is fearful of standing up for right when it may cost him dearly, who doubts God's power to protect, and who allows hatred to divide him from his children just as it had divided him from his brother."⁸⁴²

⁸³⁷See Calum M. Carmichael, "Forbidden Mixtures," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:4 (1982):394-415.

⁸³⁸Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 569. Noah's curse on Canaan and his seed had warned the rest of humanity that bad things would happen to people who mixed with the Canaanites (cf. 9:25-27).

⁸³⁹Thomas, p. 325.

⁸⁴⁰Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 200; and idem, "Genesis," p. 214.

⁸⁴¹For an interesting summary of post-biblical rabbinic traditions concerning the characters and events of this chapter, see Jeffrey K. Salkin, "Dinah, The Torah's Forgotten Woman," *Judaism* 35:3 (Summer 1986):284-89.

⁸⁴²Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 318.

Many believers bring the wrath of unbelievers on themselves and on other believers by their ungodly behavior, as Jacob, Simeon, and Levi did.

15. Jacob's return to Bethel ch. 35

After God reminded Jacob of his commitment to Him (28:20-22), the patriarch returned to Bethel to worship Yahweh. There the Lord reconfirmed the promises to him and completed his family by the birth of Benjamin. However, Jacob also experienced three deaths (Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac) and rebellion against himself by Reuben.

Jacob's renewed consecration to Yahweh 35:1-8

About 10 years had passed since Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, and he had not yet returned to Bethel to fulfill his vow there (28:20-22). He should have headed there immediately rather than settling near Shechem. His negligence evidently was due in part to the continuing presence of the idols that Rachel and probably others had brought from Haran. Perhaps their allegiance to these gods restrained Jacob's total commitment to Yahweh.

God appeared to Jacob (the fourth time) and commanded him to fulfill his vow (v. 1). This revelation encouraged Jacob to stop procrastinating. This is the first time God commanded a patriarch to build an altar. The command constituted a test of Jacob's obedience similar to Abraham's test when God instructed him to offer up "a burnt offering" on Mt. Moriah (22:2). In preparation for his trip to Bethel he purged his household of idolatry by literally burying Rachel's idols along with other objects associated with the worship of these gods. He also purified himself from the defilement of the blood his family had shed in Shechem (ch. 34).

"It is significant that Jacob called God the one 'who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone' (v. 3). That epithet serves as a fitting summary of the picture of God that has emerged from the Jacob narratives. Jacob was in constant distress; yet in each instance God remained faithful to his promise and delivered him."⁸⁴³

The oak referred to here (v. 4) seems to have been the oak of Moreh (lit. "teacher") where God had appeared to Abraham shortly after he had entered the land (12:6).

"At the same spot, possibly prompted by Jacob's example, Joshua was one day to issue a very similar call to Israel (Josh. 24:23ff.)."⁸⁴⁴

God blessed Jacob for his commitment, expressed in his burying the idols and earrings (perhaps taken from the Shechemites), by placing the fear of Jacob's family in the hearts of the Canaanites whom they passed on their way to Bethel (vv. 5-8; cf. Prov. 16:7). Perhaps God used the memory of Simeon and Levi's fierce treatment of the Shechemites to accomplish this end.

⁸⁴³Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 217.

⁸⁴⁴Kidner, p. 175.

"Throughout his life Jacob has had to contend with his own fears—fear of God (28:17), fear of Laban (31:31), fear of Esau (32:8, 12 [Eng. 7, 11]). Nobody had been in fear of him. Angry, yes; fearful, no."⁸⁴⁵

Jacob faithfully fulfilled his vow to God at Luz, which he renamed Bethel (house of God, v. 15). He named the place of his altar El-Bethel (God of Bethel, v. 7) in memory of God's first revelation to him there. This is the first revival recorded in the Bible.

Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (cf. 24:59), must have been an important member of Jacob's household to merit this notation by the writer. She may have left Beersheba with Jacob or may have joined him later after the death of Rebekah. The reference to Deborah is probably a way of reminding the reader of Rebekah and alluding to her death in a veiled manner.⁸⁴⁶ This may have been appropriate in view of Rebekah's deception of Isaac (ch. 27).⁸⁴⁷

Yahweh's reconfirmation of the covenant 35:9-15

God then appeared again to Jacob at Bethel (the fifth revelation) after he had fulfilled his vow to God and built an altar there (vv. 9-12). This revelation came 30 years after the first one at Bethel. In this case God appeared in visible (bodily?) form (v. 13). In the former instance Jacob had seen a vision. God confirmed Jacob's name change (cf. 32:28). This new name, Israel, was a pledge that God would do what He now promised Jacob: to give him numerous descendants and the land of Canaan. Here God summed up all the long-range promises that He had made to Jacob at various times in his life.

"The purpose of the second renaming . . . is to erase the original negative connotation and to give the name Israel a more neutral or even positive connotation—the connotation it is to have for the remainder of the Torah. It does so by removing the notion of struggle associated with the wordplay in 23:28 . . . and letting it stand in a positive light . . ."⁸⁴⁸

God's use of his name "God Almighty" (El Shaddai) is significant in view of what God promised Jacob. It would take an omnipotent God to fulfill these promises (cf. 17:1-2).

Jacob solemnized this occasion by setting up a second pillar (cf. 28:18) that perpetuated the memory of God's faithfulness for the benefit of his descendants. He not only set the stone apart as special by pouring oil on it, as he had done 30 years earlier, but also made an offering to God there and renamed the place "Bethel."

"Bethel occupies something of the same focal place in Jacob's career that the birth of Isaac occupied for Abraham, testing his fluctuating obedience and his hold on the promise, for more than twenty years."⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁵Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 377.

⁸⁴⁶Gary A. Rendsburg, "Notes on Genesis XXXV," *Vetus Testamentum* 34:3 (July 1984):361-65.

⁸⁴⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 473.

⁸⁴⁸Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 203. Cf. idem, "Genesis," pp. 217-18.

⁸⁴⁹Kidner, p. 174.

God's blessing of Jacob when his dedication was complete illustrates God's response to those who fully obey Him.

"The importance of God's words to Jacob in vv. 11-12 cannot be overemphasized. First, God's words 'be fruitful and increase in number' recalled clearly the primeval blessing of Creation (1:28) and hence showed God to be still 'at work' in bringing about the blessing to all mankind through Jacob. Second, for the first time since 17:16 ('kings of peoples will come from her'), the mention is made of royalty ('kings,' v. 11) in the promised line. Third, the promise of the land, first given to Abraham and then to Isaac, was renewed here with Jacob (v. 12). Thus within these brief words several major themes of the book have come together. The primeval blessing of mankind was renewed through the promise of a royal offspring and the gift of the land."⁸⁵⁰

We can enjoy the fellowship with God that He created us to experience only when we commit ourselves wholeheartedly to Him and obey His Word.

"It is noteworthy that there are certain things in connection with the spiritual life that must be entirely given up and destroyed, for it is impossible to sanctify or consecrate them. They must be buried and left behind, for they cannot possibly be devoted to the service of God. . . . There are things that have to be cut off and cannot be consecrated. Books have to be burned (note xix. 19). Evil habits have to be broken. Sin must be put away. There are things that are beyond all reclamation . . .

". . . if only we yield ourselves wholly and utterly to the hand of God, our lives, whatever the past may have been, shall be monuments, miracles, marvels of the grace of God."⁸⁵¹

Still all of Jacob's problems were not behind him. (Someone has said that the person whose problems are all behind him or her is probably a school bus driver!)

"Just as Abraham had two sons and only one was the son of promise, and just as Isaac had two sons and only one was the son of the blessing, so now Jacob, though he has twelve sons, has two wives (Leah and Rachel); and each has a son (Judah and Joseph) that can rightfully contend for the blessing. In the narratives that follow, the writer holds both sons, Joseph and Judah, before the readers as rightful heirs of the promise. As the Jacob narratives have already anticipated, in the end it was Judah, the son of Leah, not Joseph, the son of Rachel, that gained the blessing (49:8-12)."⁸⁵²

⁸⁵⁰Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 218.

⁸⁵¹Thomas, pp. 331, 336.

⁸⁵²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 218.

The birth of Benjamin, death of Rachel, and sin of Reuben 35:16-29

Jacob was not disobedient to God in leaving Bethel. God's instructions to go to Bethel and "live there" (v. 1) were evidently directions to dwell there while he fulfilled his vow. God did not command permanent residence there.

35:16-22a Ben-oni means "son of my pain (v. 18)." For Rachel, Benjamin's birth was a fatally painful experience. However the birth of his twelfth son mollified Jacob's sorrow over Rachel's death. He named his son Benjamin meaning, "Son of my good fortune."⁸⁵³ *Oni* in Hebrew can mean either trouble or wealth. This is the only son that Jacob named, which suggests his renewed leadership of the family. Benjamin was born in land that later became part of his tribe's allotment. His birth there gave him title to it.

Jacob buried Rachel near Ephrath, an older name for Bethlehem (house of bread; vv. 19-20).⁸⁵⁴ The opening section of the Isaac *toledot* (25:19-26) contained the record of two births: Esau's and Jacob's. Its closing section (35:16-29) documented two deaths: Deborah's and Rachel's. Ironically Rachel, who had cried in desperation to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die" (30:1), died giving birth to a child.

The tower of Eder (or Migdal Eder) was simply a watchtower built to help shepherds protect their flocks from robbers (v. 21; cf. 2 Kings 18:8; 2 Chron. 26:10; 27:4). Since the time of Jerome, the early church father who lived in Bethlehem, tradition has held that Eder lay very close to Bethlehem.

A concubine was sometimes a slave with whom her owner had sexual relations. She enjoyed some of the privileges of a wife, and people sometimes called her a wife in patriarchal times, but she was not a wife in the full sense of the term.

Reuben may have wanted to prevent Rachel's maid from succeeding Rachel as his father's favorite wife. He probably resented the fact that Jacob did not honor his mother.⁸⁵⁵ Reuben's act constituted a claim against (a challenge to) his father as well as being an immoral act (cf. Deut. 22:30; 2 Sam. 16:21-22; 1 Kings 2:13-25). In the ancient Near East a man who wanted to assert his superiority over another man might do so by having sexual relations with that man's wife or concubine (cf. 2 Sam. 16:21-22). Ancient Near Easterners regarded this act of physical domination as an evidence of personal superiority.

⁸⁵³See James Muilenberg, "The Birth of Benjamin," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75 (1956):194-201.

⁸⁵⁴Both Bethlehem and Kiriath Jeraim became known as Ephrath(a) because the clan of Ephrath settled in both places (cf. 1 Chron. 2:50).

⁸⁵⁵Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 327.

"Taking the concubine of one's predecessor was a perverted way of claiming to be the new lord of the bride."⁸⁵⁶

Reuben's act, therefore, manifested rebellion against Jacob's authority as well as unbridled lust. It resulted in his losing the birthright. Judah obtained the right to rule as head of the family, and Levi got the right to be the family priest eventually. The double portion of his father's inheritance went to Joseph who realized it through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

"At an early stage in the narrative Reuben had played some small part in the all too brief restoration to his mother of her conjugal rights (Gen. XXX. 14ff.), but now, at the end of the Jacob narrative, it is by his agency that the supplanter is well and truly supplanted."⁸⁵⁷

As at Shechem, Jacob reacted passively. Moses wrote that he heard of Reuben's act, but not that he did anything about it.

35:22b-27 This paragraph is important because it records the entrance of Jacob into his father's inheritance. Jacob presumably visited Isaac in Hebron on various occasions following his return from Paddan-aram. However on this occasion he moved his family to his father's encampment and evidently remained there as Isaac's heir.

Jacob had left Beersheba with only a staff in his hand. Now he returned with 12 sons, a large household, and much livestock. The most important aspect of God's blessing was his 12 sons, grouped here with their four mothers, through whom God would fulfill His promises to the patriarchs.

Benjamin was not born in Paddan-aram but near Bethlehem (vv. 16-18). Therefore the statement that Jacob's 12 sons were born in Paddan-aram (v. 26) must be understood as a general one.

35:28-29 With the record of Jacob entering into his father's inheritance the history of Isaac's life concludes. He was buried in the cave of Machpelah near Hebron (49:29-31). Isaac lived for 12 years after Jacob's relocation to Hebron, however. He shared Jacob's grief over the apparent death of Joseph, but died shortly before Joseph's promotion in Egypt.⁸⁵⁸

"The end of the Jacob narratives is marked by the death of his father, Isaac. The purpose of this notice is not simply to record Isaac's death but

⁸⁵⁶Jordan, p. 65.

⁸⁵⁷George G. Nicol, "Genesis XXIX. 32 and XXXV. 22a: Reuben's Reversal," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31:2 (October 1980):538.

⁸⁵⁸See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:320, for a chronology of these events.

rather to show the complete fulfillment of God's promise to Jacob (28:21). According to Jacob's vow, he had asked that God watch over him during his sojourn and return him safely to the house of his father. Thus the conclusion of the narrative marks the final fulfillment of these words as Jacob returned to the house of his father, Isaac, before he died."⁸⁵⁹

It is very important that God's people follow through and keep the commitments they have made concerning participation in His program. When they commit themselves to Him in purity and worship, He commits Himself to blessing them.

D. WHAT BECAME OF ESAU 36:1—37:1

Moses included this relatively short, segmented genealogy (*toledot*) in the sacred record to show God's faithfulness in multiplying Abraham's seed as He had promised. He also did so to provide connections with the descendants of Esau referred to later in the history of Israel. Among his descendants were the Edomites (v. 8) and the Amalekites (v. 12). Lot, Ishmael, and Esau all walked out of the line of promise.

We can divide this chapter as follows.

Esau's three wives and five sons, vv. 1-8

Esau's five sons and 10 grandsons, vv. 9-14

Chiefs (political or military leaders) descended from Esau, vv. 15-19

Chiefs of the Horites (with whom the Edomites intermarried and whom they dispossessed), vv. 20-30

Kings of Edom, vv. 31-39

A final list of chiefs, vv. 40-43

Different names of Esau's wives appear here as compared with what Moses recorded earlier (v. 2; cf. 26:34; 28:9).⁸⁶⁰ People added surnames to given names later in life. Women often received new names when they married. Esau married a Hittite (v. 2), a Hivite (v. 2) who was a descendant of a Horite (Hurrian, v. 20), and an Ishmaelite (v. 3). Some commentators connected the Horites with cave dwellers since the Hebrew word for cave is *hor*.⁸⁶¹ This may be correct.

Esau's sons were born in Canaan and then moved out of the Promised Land to Seir. Jacob's sons, except for Benjamin, were born outside Canaan in Paddan-aram and later moved into the Promised Land.

The Kenizzites (vv. 11, 15) later affiliated with the tribe of Judah.⁸⁶² The Amalekites separated from the other Edomites and became an independent people early in their

⁸⁵⁹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 220.

⁸⁶⁰For an explanation, see Keil and Delitzsch, 1:321-22.

⁸⁶¹E.g., Speiser, p. 283; Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 223.

⁸⁶²J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, pp. 391-92.

history (v. 12).⁸⁶³ A group of them settled in what later became southern Judah as far as Kadesh Barnea and the border of Egypt (14:7; Num. 13:29; 14:43, 45). Another branch of the tribe settled in the hill country of Ephraim that was in central Canaan (Judg. 12:15). The largest group of Amalekites lived in Arabia to the southeast of Canaan and Edom. They united on occasion with their neighbors, the Midianites (Judg. 6:3; 7:12) and the Ammonites (Judg. 3:13). Saul defeated the Amalekites (1 Sam. 14:48; 15:2) as David did (1 Sam. 27:8; 30:1; 2 Sam 8:12). Some Simeonites finally exterminated them during Hezekiah's reign (1 Chron. 4:42-43).

"What is most interesting about the king list [vv. 31-39] is that it reflects an elective kingship rather than a dynastic one. . . .

"These 'kings' may have indeed been charismatic individuals who, like the judges, assumed their office without regard to heredity."⁸⁶⁴

This list of Edomite kings demonstrates the partial fulfillment of God's promise that kings would come from Abraham's loins (17:16).

"It might seem unusual that such detail concerning the descendants of Esau be included, but the relationship between Esau and Jacob, and then between the nations of Edom and Israel, is a theme of the entire Old Testament."⁸⁶⁵

"What Israelites did to Canaanites, Esauites did to Horites. Thus Gen. 36 is moving backward from the conquerors (vv. 9-19) to the conquered (vv. 20-30)."⁸⁶⁶

Jacob was living at Hebron when Joseph's brothers sold him, and he may have continued living there until he moved to Egypt (37:1; cf. 35:27).

"Verse 1 [of chapter 37] belongs structurally to the preceding narrative as a conclusion to the Jacob story. It shows Jacob back in the Land of Promise but still dwelling there as a sojourner like his father before him. The writer's point is to show that the promises of God had not yet been completely fulfilled and that Jacob, as his fathers before him, was still awaiting the fulfillment."⁸⁶⁷

Perhaps the major lesson of this genealogy is that secular greatness develops faster than spiritual greatness. Consequently the godly must wait patiently for the fulfillment of God's promises.

⁸⁶³See the chart illustrating their family relationship among my comments on 25:1-6.

⁸⁶⁴Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 400.

⁸⁶⁵Davis, p. 259. For archaeological discoveries relating to the Edomites, see Itzhaq Beit-Arieh, "New Light on the Edomites," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 14:2 (March-April 1988):28-41.

⁸⁶⁶Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 397.

⁸⁶⁷Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 225. Cf. Heb. 11:39.

E. WHAT BECAME OF JACOB 37:2—50:26

Here begins the tenth and last *toledot* in Genesis. Jacob remains a major character throughout Genesis. Moses recorded his death in chapter 49. Nevertheless Joseph replaces him as the focus of the writer's attention at this point.⁸⁶⁸ These chapters are not entirely about Joseph, however. The writer showed interest in all the sons of Jacob and among them especially Judah.⁸⁶⁹

"The emphasis now shifts from Jacob's personal struggles to receive the blessing promised to Abraham and Isaac, to the events in Jacob's life that lead up to the formation of Israel as a nation."⁸⁷⁰

The story of Joseph also links the history of the patriarchs with their settlement in Egypt.

"The Joseph story . . . develops the theme of the Pentateuch by showing the gradual fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham in 12:1-3. In particular, it shows how God blesses the nations through the descendants of Abraham [cf. 50:20]."⁸⁷¹

"The theme of the Joseph narrative concerns God's hidden and decisive power which works in and through but also against human forms of power. A 'soft' word for that reality is *providence*. A harder word for the same reality is *predestination*. Either way God is working out his purpose through and in spite of Egypt, through and in spite of Joseph and his brothers."⁸⁷²

Human responsibility is as much a revelation of this section as divine sovereignty.

1. God's choice of Joseph 37:2-11

Joseph faithfully served his father even bringing back a bad report of his brothers' behavior to him for which Jacob expressed his love by giving Joseph preferential treatment. However his brothers envied and hated him. God confirmed His choice of Joseph as leader, an event that perplexed Jacob and infuriated Joseph's brothers.

37:2-4 Joseph was tending his father's flock with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. This description prefigures Joseph's later shepherding role in relation to his brothers, after they became dependent on him.

⁸⁶⁸For some enriching insights into the similarities between the stories of Jacob and Joseph, see Peter Miscall, "The Jacob and Joseph Stories As Analogies," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 6 (February 1978):28-40.

⁸⁶⁹See Bryan Smith, "The Central Role of Judah in Genesis 37—50," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:646 (April-June 2005):158-74.

⁸⁷⁰Aalders, 2:179.

⁸⁷¹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 344.

⁸⁷²Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 293. Richard D. Patterson, "Joseph in Pharaoh's Court," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:654 (April-June 2007):148-64, concluded that the genre of Joseph's story in chapters 37—50 is a court narrative. He included many observations on the narrative features of the story in this article.

Joseph's "bad report" implies that the brothers were participating in serious wicked behavior. This is not hard to believe in view of their former treatment of the Shechemites and their later treatment of Joseph and Jacob.

The use of the name Israel (v. 3) suggests that Jacob's special love for Joseph had a divine origin and was part of God's plan for the chosen family. However, Jacob's favoritism of Joseph over his other sons was wrong and fueled the brothers' hatred of Joseph. Favoritism had a long history in Jacob's family (Isaac's preference for Esau, Rebekah's for Jacob, and Jacob's preference for Rachel). In every case it created major problems. Leah was hated, so her sons hated (cf. 29:31, 33).

"Son of his old age" means wise son, or son of wisdom. Joseph was old for his years; he had the wisdom of age in his youth. Joseph was born when Jacob was 91 years old, but he was not Jacob's youngest son. At least one of Joseph's brothers was younger than he, Benjamin.

The "varicolored tunic" was probably also a long robe. The sons of nobles wore long robes with long sleeves and ornamentation, like Joseph's, as did Tamar, King David's daughter (2 Sam. 13:18).

"It was a mark of distinction that carried its own meaning, for it implied that exemption from labor which was the peculiar privilege of the heir or prince of the Eastern clan."⁸⁷³

Such a garment identified the possessor of the birthright. This sign of Jacob's love for Joseph constantly irritated the jealous brothers.

"The story of Jacob features rocks; that of Joseph features robes (37:3, 23; 39:12; 41:14). These palpable objects symbolize something of the characters' social and/or spiritual situations."⁸⁷⁴

37:5-11 Joseph's dreams were revelations from God. Joseph, his brothers, and his father did not grasp their significance fully until God brought them to pass. Joseph regarded his dreams as important, however, and therefore did not hesitate to make them known to his family.

"This is the first dream in the Bible in which God does not speak (cf. 20:3; 28:12-15; 31:11, 24). It forms a transition in the dominant means of God's revelation from theophany in Genesis 1—11, to dreams and visions in Genesis 12—35, and now to providence in Genesis 36—50. These three

⁸⁷³Thomas, p. 356.

⁸⁷⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 499.

stages resemble the three parts of TaNaK (i.e., the OT). In the *Torah* ('Law'), God speaks to Moses in theophany; in the *Nebiim* ('Prophets'), he speaks in dreams and visions; and in the *Ketubim* ('Writings'), he works mostly through providence."⁸⁷⁵

In the first dream (v. 7) God revealed that Joseph's brothers would come to him for bread. Note the agricultural motif in both the dream and its fulfillment. His brothers did not fail to note Joseph's position of superiority over them (v. 8), and they resented still more humiliation from him.

In the second dream (v. 9), which was even grander, Joseph was himself supreme over the whole house of Israel. The repetition of the main point of the dream confirmed that what God predicted would certainly happen (cf. 41:32). Jacob took note of these revelations but resented the possibility that his son might be in a position of authority over him (vv. 10-11). Many people today also are offended by God's election of some to special prominence and usefulness.

"Joseph is depicted as morally good but immature and bratty. His tattling, boasting, and robe parading inflames his brother's hatred against him."⁸⁷⁶

"God's future agent and mouthpiece in Egypt could hardly make a worse impression on his first appearance: spoiled brat, talebearer, braggart."⁸⁷⁷

Textual references cannot establish whether Joseph realized that his dreams were divine prophecies or not. People often regarded dreams as divine revelations in the ancient East.⁸⁷⁸ If Joseph did, the fact that he related them boldly to his family may indicate his faith.⁸⁷⁹

"More than likely, the dream, and its recounting, is to be understood as an unsuspecting prophecy uttered by Joseph. God has a plan for his life, a destiny in his future, and Joseph spontaneously shares the enthusiasm that revelation spawns."⁸⁸⁰

God chooses faithful, righteous individuals for positions of leadership, but those chosen may experience the jealous hatred of their brethren.

⁸⁷⁵Ibid., p. 500.

⁸⁷⁶Ibid., p. 498.

⁸⁷⁷Sternberg, p. 98.

⁸⁷⁸Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 600.

⁸⁷⁹Cf. Erdman, p. 113.

⁸⁸⁰Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 410.

2. The sale of Joseph into Egypt 37:12-36

Joseph's brothers met his second recorded visit to them with great antagonism. They plotted to kill him and so render his dreams impossible to fulfill. For practical reasons they decided to sell him and to deceive Jacob into thinking that a wild beast had killed him. In spite of their plan God kept Joseph alive and safe in Egypt.

37:12-17 It was not uncommon for shepherds to lead their flocks many miles from home in search of pasture. Shechem was about 60 miles north of Hebron. Jacob owned land there. Dothan was 17 miles farther north.

37:18-24 The extreme measures Joseph's brothers considered to silence him have led some commentators to conclude that it was not just personal hatred springing from jealousy that motivated them. They may have wanted to alter the will of God as revealed in Joseph's dreams.

"The brothers' hate is therefore a rebellion against the matter contained in the dreams, against the divine power itself, standing behind them, who had given the dreams. The expression usually translated by 'the dreamer' [v. 19] means much more than our English word, namely, the one empowered to prophetic dreams."⁸⁸¹

Reuben as the first-born looked after his father's interests and, knowing what sorrow Joseph's death would bring to Jacob, sought to spare Joseph's life and release him from the pit later. Joseph's place of confinement was evidently a dry well or cistern.

37:25-28 Dothan lay on a caravan route that ran from Damascus to Egypt.⁸⁸² The next time the brothers would eat a meal in Joseph's presence he would sit at the head table (43:32-34).

Moses referred to the traders that bought Joseph as Ishmaelites (vv. 25, 27, 28) and Midianites (v. 28). Probably the caravan contained a mixture of both of these groups of Abraham's descendants who were nomadic caravan merchants (cf. 39:1; Judg. 8:24). Residents of this area sometimes used these names interchangeably. "Ishmaelite" is the more generic term for a Bedouin nomad. It became a general designation for desert tribes. "Midianite" is the more specific ethnic term.⁸⁸³ Alternatively, "Ishmaelites" may designate a league of tribes with the Midianites constituting one element (cf. 25:13-17).⁸⁸⁴ Rather than agents of death, the traders proved to be God's instruments of deliverance.

⁸⁸¹von Rad, p. 353.

⁸⁸²See Ammon Ben-Tor, "The Trade Relations of Palestine in the Early Bronze Age," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 29:1 (February 1986):1-27.

⁸⁸³Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 423.

⁸⁸⁴Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 355.

Judah, like Reuben, did not relish killing Joseph. Yet he was not willing to let him go free either. Probably he dreaded the prospect of Joseph receiving the rights of the first-born since he, Judah, was in line for Jacob's blessing. His suggestion that the brothers sell Joseph implies that he knew slave trading was common in Egypt. The price agreed on for Joseph was the same price that God later specified the Israelites should pay for a slave between the ages of five and 20 years under the Mosaic economy (Lev. 27:5). These prices were evidently standard in the ancient Near East at this time. Shepherds employed by others earned about eight shekels a year.⁸⁸⁵

"If Joseph steps onto the pages of sacred history as a bratty do-gooder, Judah enters as a slave trader who has turned his back on Abraham's God-given vision. He is callous toward his father and cynical about the covenant family."⁸⁸⁶

The significance of the action of Joseph's brothers was greater than may appear at first.

"They had not only sold their brother, but in their brother they had cast out a member of the seed promised and given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from the fellowship of the chosen family, and sinned against the God of salvation and His promises."⁸⁸⁷

37:29-36 Reuben was absent during the sale of Joseph. When he returned and found Joseph missing he felt great distress. Jacob would have held him responsible for Joseph's safety since Reuben was the eldest of the brothers. Joseph's brothers covered one sin with another.

"The message accompanying the cloak [v. 32] has a certain blunt brutality about it. They did not try to soften the blow."⁸⁸⁸

Jacob had deceived his father with the skin of a goat (27:16). Now his sons were deceiving him with the blood of a goat (v. 31).

Had Jacob believed more strongly in God's revelations in Joseph's dreams he might not have jumped to the conclusion that Joseph was dead, and his sorrow might not have been as great (cf. 2 Sam. 18:33). Jacob's fears were groundless, but he did not realize this because he chose in this instance to live by sight rather than by faith.

⁸⁸⁵Ibid., p. 356.

⁸⁸⁶Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 508.

⁸⁸⁷Keil and Delitzsch, 1:332.

⁸⁸⁸Leupold, 2:973.

The Pharaoh referred to (v. 36) was probably Ammenemes II (1929-1895 B.C.). The capital city during this period (the twelfth dynasty) was Memphis. This is where Joseph was taken. Potiphar, as Pharaoh's bodyguard captain, would have been in charge of the king's executioners who carried out the capital sentences ordered by Pharaoh.⁸⁸⁹ Josephus called Potiphar Pharaoh's chief cook, which may or may not have been correct.⁸⁹⁰

This chapter is the first of many in the record of Joseph's experiences that demonstrates God's ability to cause the wrath of men to praise Him (Ps. 76:10). He can make even bad situations work for the accomplishment of His purposes and for the blessing of His elect (Rom. 8:28).

"Envy is the root of almost every sin against our brethren. And whenever it is harbored, there is an end of all peace, rest, and satisfaction. Envy is 'the rottenness of the bones' (Prov. xiv. 30), and no one can stand against it (Prov. xxvii. 4). 'Where envying is, there is confusion and every evil work' (James iii. 16)."⁸⁹¹

"The Genesis account presents Joseph as a very unusual young man, possessed of a strong and sterling character, of a high morality and fidelity to God and his superiors. He was also characterized by gentleness in human relations. Remarkably, Joseph's spiritual and moral strength does not appear to be based on or related to God's periodic and direct revelations, as was true of Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. Presumably then Jacob must have put a lot of character building truth into the young man's life at an early time. It does not appear that he could have obtained such information from any other source. If this is the case, Jacob did a much better job with Joseph than with his other sons."⁸⁹²

"They [Joseph's older brothers] had been brought up under the influence of the old Jacob, while Joseph had been the companion of the changed Jacob or 'Israel.'"⁸⁹³

The motivation of Joseph is not completely clear in the text. Consequently students of his life have made judgments about his character that are both positive and negative. Most have concluded that he was one of the greatest men in history.⁸⁹⁴ A few have contested this view and have believed that he was selfish and manipulative.⁸⁹⁵ I believe the textual evidence favors the former view.

⁸⁸⁹"Potiphar" is a shortened form of Potiphara (41:45) meaning "he whom Ra [the sun-god] has given."

⁸⁹⁰Josephus, 2:4:1. See Magen Broshi, "The Credibility of Josephus," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1982):379-384.

⁸⁹¹Thomas, pp. 361-62.

⁸⁹²H. Vos, p. 134.

⁸⁹³Thomas, p. 355.

⁸⁹⁴E.g., Thomas Mann's 1,600 page *Joseph and His Brothers*.

⁸⁹⁵E.g., Maurice Samuel, *Certain People of the Book*; idem, "Joseph—The Brilliant Failure," *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1986):38-51, 68.

People who serve faithfully as unto the Lord often experience severe persecution, but God will preserve them so they can fulfill their God-given destiny.

3. Judah and Tamar ch. 38

This chapter seems at first out of place since it interrupts the story of Joseph, but remember that this is the *toledot* of Jacob. This is the story of what happened to his whole family, not just Joseph. The central problem with which the chapter deals is childlessness. The events of the chapter must span at least 20 years, years during which Joseph was lost to his family (cf. 37:2; 41:46-47; 45:6).

Judah tried unsuccessfully to insure the levirate rights of his daughter-in-law Tamar. As a last resort Tamar deceived him into having sexual intercourse with her by masquerading as a prostitute. She thereby maintained her right to become the mother of Judah's children, the younger of which displaced his older twin in an unusual birth.

"The following sketch from the life of Judah is intended to point out the origin of the three leading families of the future princely tribe in Israel [Shelah, Perez, and Zerah] and at the same time to show in what danger the sons of Jacob would have been of forgetting the sacred vocation of their race, through marriages with Canaanitish women, and of perishing in the sin of Canaan, if the mercy of God had not interposed, and by leading Joseph into Egypt prepared the way for the removal of the whole house of Jacob into that land, and thus protected the family, just as it was expanding into a nation, from the corrupting influence of the manners and customs of Canaan."⁸⁹⁶

This chapter records the compromise of the Israelites, specifically Judah, with the Canaanites, Shua and Tamar, that resulted in the confusion of seed, the chosen with the condemned. Jacob alluded to this mixture in his prophecy (ch. 49). It is perhaps the basis for the prohibition against mixing various kinds of seed, yoking two different kinds of animals together, weaving two kinds of thread into cloth, etc., in the Mosaic Law.⁸⁹⁷

"One gets the distinct impression that ever since the Dinah incident (ch. 34) Jacob has less and less control over the behavior of his family."⁸⁹⁸

38:1-11 Levirate marriage (the marriage of a man to his deceased brother's wife to provide his brother with an heir) was a common custom in the ancient Near East at this time (vv. 8-10).⁸⁹⁹ It was common also in Asia, Africa, and other areas, but it evidently originated in Mesopotamia. The Mosaic Law did not abolish it but restricted it in Israel to preserve the sanctity of marriage (cf. Deut. 25:5-10).

⁸⁹⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 1:338-39.

⁸⁹⁷Cf. Carmichael, pp. 394-415.

⁸⁹⁸Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 433.

⁸⁹⁹de Vaux, pp. 37-38.

"The enormity of Onan's sin is in its studied outrage against the family, against his brother's widow and against his own body. The standard English versions fail to make clear that this was his persistent practice. *When* (9) should be translated 'whenever.'"⁹⁰⁰

Onan's refusal to give Tamar a child not only demonstrated a lack of love for his deceased brother. It also revealed Onan's selfish heart that wanted for himself what would have gone to his elder brother's heir. If Tamar had born him a son, that child would have been the perpetuator of Er's name as well as that of Onan (cf. Ruth 4:5, 21-22). God judged Onan's sin severely because descendants were important in His plans for the patriarchs. Onan was deliberately frustrating the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. 11:4).⁹⁰¹

Judah sinned against Tamar by forcing her to live as a widow (v. 11). He wrongly blamed Tamar for the death of his sons (cf. v. 26) rather than blaming his sons. Tamar had every right to children. Moreover as a member of the chosen family, Judah should have made certain that she had another legitimate opportunity to bear children.

Judah comes across at the beginning of this incident again as a hard and callous man. He had previously suggested selling Joseph into slavery to make money from him and deceiving Jacob despite Reuben's protests (37:26-27, 29-30). Now he showed no grief over the deaths of his sons, in contrast to Jacob who mourned inconsolably over Joseph's apparent death (37:34-35). Judah also ordered the burning of his daughter-in-law (38:24).

38:12-30 When Judah deceived Jacob, a goat and an item of clothing featured in the trick, and here a goat and an item of clothing again figure in Tamar's deception of Judah. Tamar's strategy for obtaining her right was not commendable. She played the role of a common whore (Heb. *zona*).⁹⁰² However the fact that she sought to obtain seed by Judah shows her legitimate desire for children at least. It probably also reveals her desire to enter into the Abrahamic promises by bearing children for Judah and his sons. Jacob's family experienced deception again.

"Tamar qualifies as a heroine in the story, for she risked everything for her right to be the mother in the family of Judah and to protect the family."⁹⁰³

⁹⁰⁰Kidner, p. 188.

⁹⁰¹This is the first text that states explicitly that God put someone to death.

⁹⁰²Judah's Canaanite friend described her as a shrine prostitute later (v. 21, Heb. *qedesa*), but he probably said this to elevate her social status in the eyes of the other men he was addressing.

⁹⁰³Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 612.

"Although Tamar's actions in this regard may seem strange to us, there is evidence that among ancient Assyrian and Hittite peoples, part of the custom was that the levirate responsibility could pass to the father of the widow's husband if there were no brothers to fulfill it. Thus Tamar was only trying to acquire that to which she had a legal right."⁹⁰⁴

Moses did not spell out her motivation. Whether or not she understood and believed the promises to the patriarchs regarding their sacred vocation, she did become an ancestor of the Messiah (Ruth 4:18-22; Matt. 1:3, 16).

"Just as in chapter 20 where the seed of Abraham was protected by the 'righteous' (*saddiq*, 20:4; NIV, 'innocent') Abimelech (cf. also 26:9-11), it is the woman Tamar, not Judah the patriarch, who is ultimately responsible for the survival of the descendants of the house of Judah."⁹⁰⁵

Judah's response to his sins against God and Tamar seems to have been genuine repentance (v. 26). He confessed his wrong and repented by ceasing from further sexual relations with her, his daughter-in-law. It is evidently because his repentance was genuine that Jacob did not exclude him from receiving a special blessing as he did Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Because he humbled himself God raised him to be the chief of the house of Israel and blessed the children that he fathered even though they were a result of his sin. (Compare God's blessing of Solomon even though he was the fruit of the unlawful union of David and Bathsheba.)

"The scene marks the beginning of Judah's transformation when he declares of Tamar, 'She is righteous, not I' (lit., 38:26)."⁹⁰⁶

". . . in its biographical sketches, character change is what Genesis is all about: Abram becomes Abraham; Jacob becomes Israel. Particularly in Jacob's family we see examples of character change: Reuben, violator of his father's concubine, later shows great concern for both Joseph and his father, while the upstart cocky Joseph becomes the wise statesman who forgives his brothers. Thus, this chapter has a most important role in clarifying the course of the subsequent narrative; without it we should find its development inexplicable."⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰⁴Aalders, 2:194.

⁹⁰⁵Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 232.

⁹⁰⁶Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 506.

⁹⁰⁷Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 364.

Perez (meaning a breach or one who breaks through) was the first of the twins born (vv. 27-30). He became the ancestor of David and Messiah (Matt. 1:3, 16). Moses may have included the unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of these twins in the record to emphasize God's selection of the son through whom the line of blessing would descend.

"He [Judah] and his brothers sold their younger brother into Egypt, thinking they could thwart God's design that the elder brothers would serve the younger Joseph. Yet in Judah's own family, despite his attempts to hinder Tamar's marriage, God's will worked out in a poignant confirmation of the principle that the elder would serve the younger."⁹⁰⁸

The scarlet thread marked the second-born, Zerah (dawning, i.e., red or scarlet). It did not indicate the Messianic line. That line came through the other son, Perez. The thread is perhaps just a detail of the story that explains the names given.

"A key to this story is the remarkable similarity between the births of Perez and Zerah and of Jacob and Esau. Both births involve twins; in both the younger thrusts ahead of the elder and displaces him; and in both the one who is naturally expected to get the birthright, but loses it, is associated with red: red stew in the case of Esau and a red string in the case of Zerah."⁹⁰⁹

"As the Jacob narrative began with an account of the struggle of the twins Jacob and Esau (25:22), so now the conclusion of the Jacob narrative is marked by a similar struggle of twins. In both cases the struggle resulted in a reversal of the right of the firstborn and the right of the blessing. . . . The brevity and austerity with which the narrative is recounted leaves the impression that the meaning of the passage is self-evident to the reader. Indeed, coming as it does on the heels of a long series of reversals in which the younger gains the upper hand on the elder, its sense is transparent."⁹¹⁰

Judah's hedonistic willfulness in this chapter contrasts with Joseph's self-control in sexual temptation in the next. Here promiscuous Judah grasps Tamar's seductive offer and enlarges his family. Later chaste Joseph resists Potiphar's wife's seductive offer and ends his career (temporarily) in prison.

⁹⁰⁸Ross, "Genesis," p. 89. See also the NET Bible note on 38:29.

⁹⁰⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 506-7.

⁹¹⁰Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 232. For a comparison of the births of Jacob and Esau with those of Perez and Zerah, see K. Luke, "Two Birth Narratives in Genesis," *Indian Theological Studies* 17:2 (June 1980):155-80.

God corrects those who disregard His plan and pursue lives of self-gratification often using talionic justice (i.e., reaping the same kind of punishment as the sin that we sow) in His discipline.

4. Joseph in Potiphar's house ch. 39

Joseph experienced God's blessing as he served faithfully in Potiphar's house. His master's wife repeatedly seduced him, but he refused her offers because he did not want to sin against God and betray Potiphar's trust. Joseph continued to enjoy God's abundant blessing even when imprisoned because of her false charge.

"Each scene in the record of Joseph's life reveals some distinctive trait of character elicited by means of a crisis."⁹¹¹

39:1-6 The clause "the Lord was with Joseph" occurs four times in this chapter (vv. 2, 3, 21, and 23) and explains the reason for his success.⁹¹² God had previously promised to be with Isaac and Jacob (26:3, 24, 28; 28:15, 20; 31:3). Yahweh is the name for God used; the covenant-keeping God of the patriarchs was with this son of Jacob far from home. Joseph had a fine physique and a handsome face, features that he shared with his mother Rachel (cf. 29:17). He proved faithful in a little and therefore the Lord placed him in charge of much (cf. Luke 16:10). Note that God blessed Potiphar because of Joseph (cf. 12:3a).

"The whole sequence of 39:2-6 is a particularly apt and clear example of the meaning of blessing in the Old Testament. Assistance and blessing belong together, though they are different. Blessing embraces both people and the rest of creation. The narrator simply presupposes that the blessing can flow over from the one whom Yahweh assists to a foreign people and adherents of a foreign religion precisely because of the one whom Yahweh assists. The power inherent in the blessing is expansive . . ."⁹¹³

39:7-23 Joseph was evidently in his mid-twenties at this time. He was in a "no win" position with Potiphar's wife. As a slave he had to obey her, but as a trustworthy and moral servant of Potiphar he had to refuse her. The typical male clothing in patriarchal times consisted of mid-calf length shorts and a tunic that resembled a long T-shirt (cf. 3:21; 37:3).⁹¹⁴ Joseph regarded obedience to God as his primary responsibility (v. 9) and therefore chose as he did (cf. Ps. 51:4).

⁹¹¹Thomas, p. 369. Cf. James 1:2-4.

⁹¹²The divine name "LORD," Yehweh, appears seven times in this chapter (vv. 2, 3 [twice], 5 [twice], 21, and 23) but only one other time in the Jacob *toledot* (37:2—50:26): in 49:18.

⁹¹³Westermann, *Genesis 36—50*, p. 63.

⁹¹⁴Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 376.

"This story about Joseph reverses a well-known plot in the patriarchal narratives. Whereas before it was the beautiful wife . . . of the patriarch who was sought by the foreign ruler, now it was Joseph, the handsome patriarch . . . himself who was sought by the wife of the foreign ruler. Whereas in the earlier narratives it was either the Lord (12:17; 20:3) or the moral purity of the foreign ruler (26:10) that rescued the wife rather than the patriarch, here it was Joseph's own moral courage that saved the day. . . . Whereas in the preceding narratives, the focus of the writer had been on God's faithfulness in fulfilling his covenant promises, in the story of Joseph his attention is turned to the human response.

"The Joseph narratives are intended then to give balance to the narratives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Together the two sections show both God's faithfulness in spite of human failure as well as the necessity of an obedient and faithful response."⁹¹⁵

Success in temptation depends more on character than on circumstances. Character rests on commitment to the will of God. We can see Joseph's character in his loyalty to Potiphar concerning what his master had entrusted to his care (v. 9). We see it in his responsibility to God for what belonged to someone else (v. 9). It is also obvious in his responsibility to God respecting his special personal calling (37:5-9; 45:5-9). Furthermore we see it in his responsibility to God concerning his sacred vocation as a member of the house of Israel.

"It is too little observed, and especially by young men who have most need to observe it, that in such temptations it is not only the sensual that needs to be guarded against, but also two much deeper-lying tendencies—the craving for loving recognition, and the desire to respond to the feminine love for admiration and devotion . . . a large proportion of misery is due to a kind of uncontrolled and mistaken chivalry."⁹¹⁶

Joseph's punishment was light in view of the charge against him. Joseph's integrity had obviously impressed Potiphar, but he may also have had questions about his wife's chastity (cf. Ps. 105:18). Joseph's slavery in Potiphar's house prefigures Israel's Egyptian bondage.

Because God was still with Joseph (vv. 21, 23), and because his character had not changed, Joseph experienced the same kind of favor at the hand of the chief jailer that he had from Potiphar. The Lord honored Joseph as one who had honored Him (1 Sam. 2:30).

⁹¹⁵Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 234, 235.

⁹¹⁶Dods, p. 344.

"Yokes borne in youth have at least three results; they prove personal integrity, they promote spiritual maturity, and they prepare for fuller opportunity. In nature and in human life the best things are not the easiest but the hardest to obtain. . . .

"How nobly Joseph comported himself amidst all these trials and hardships! He might have sulked and become embittered; but instead of this his spirit was unconquerable by reason of its trust in God. He steadfastly refused to be unfaithful to his God, whatever might be the consequences. In duty he was loyal, in temptation he was strong, and in prison he was faithful. When this spirit actuates our life, difficulties become means of grace and stepping-stones to higher things. On the other hand, if difficulties are met in a fretful, murmuring, complaining, disheartened spirit, not only do we lose the blessings that would otherwise come through them, but our spiritual life suffers untold injury, and we are weakened for the next encounter of temptation whenever it comes. There is scarcely anything in the Christian life which reveals more thoroughly what our Christianity is worth than the way we meet difficulties by the use of the grace of God."⁹¹⁷

This chapter reveals that dedication to God's calling enables His servants to resist temptation.⁹¹⁸

5. The prisoners' dreams and Joseph's interpretations ch. 40

When Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker had disturbing dreams in prison, Joseph foretold the cupbearer's restoration and the baker's execution, but Joseph remained in prison because the cupbearer forgot him.

The cupbearer and baker were responsible for Pharaoh's drink and food (vv. 1-4).⁹¹⁹ Perhaps both were in prison because someone had tried to poison Pharaoh, or so it seemed, and Pharaoh could not determine immediately which of the two men was responsible.

The place of confinement was the state prison: a round, wall-enclosed building probably attached to Potiphar's house, as was customary in Egypt (vv. 3, 7). The chief jailer (39:21-23) was evidently in charge of the prison, under Potiphar's authority. Potiphar gave Joseph the job of servicing Pharaoh's two important prisoners.

"Genuine loyalty to God will always express itself in absolute faithfulness in every-day duty."⁹²⁰

⁹¹⁷Thomas, pp. 375-76. Cf. James 1.

⁹¹⁸See Doug Mennen, "How the Wise Man Overcomes Temptation," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):90.

⁹¹⁹Nehemiah occupied a similar position to this cupbearer later in the Persian court (cf. Neh. 1:11—2:8).

⁹²⁰Thomas, p. 380.

The Egyptians and the Babylonians regarded dreams as very significant predictions (vv. 5-8).⁹²¹

"There were men who had learned the technique of interpreting dreams, and there was a considerable literature on the subject."⁹²²

The dreams of the cupbearer and baker were revelations from God. Realizing that God had given him the ability to interpret their divine revelations Joseph invited the two prisoners to relate their dreams to him. He was careful, however, to give God the glory for his interpretative gift (v. 8; cf. 41:16, 25, 28, 39). Daniel also had this ability and likewise gave God the credit (cf. Dan. 2:28).⁹²³

The baker would not simply suffer execution, but his corpse would then be impaled and publicly exposed. The Egyptians did this to prevent his spirit from resting in the afterlife.⁹²⁴

The significance of this chapter lies in Joseph's God-given ability to interpret dreams. This gift and Joseph's use of it on this occasion prepared the way for Pharaoh calling for Joseph to interpret his dreams two years later and exalting him in the government (ch. 41).

"Trials may be viewed from two standpoints, and it will make all the difference to our spiritual life and peace which of these two points of view we take. From the human side Joseph's suffering was due to injustice on the part of Potiphar, and ingratitude on the part of the butler. From the Divine side these years were permitted for the purpose of training and preparing Joseph for the great work that lay before him. If we look only at the human side of trial we shall become discouraged, and it [*sic*] may be irritated and angered, but as we turn to look at it from the Divine side we shall see God in everything and all things working together for our good."⁹²⁵

Those who faithfully use the abilities that God has given them, even in discouraging circumstances, demonstrate unwavering faith in God's promises to them.

6. Pharaoh's dreams and Joseph's interpretations ch. 41

Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's two dreams faithfully. This led to God elevating Joseph in the government and demonstrating His sovereign control over economic life in Egypt as He prepared to preserve Israel through the coming famine.

⁹²¹Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 218-19.

⁹²²von Rad, p. 371.

⁹²³For other remarkable parallels between Joseph and Daniel, see Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 637.

⁹²⁴Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 384.

⁹²⁵Thomas, p. 389.

- 41:1-8 The "magicians" were "men of the priestly caste, who occupied themselves with the sacred arts and sciences of the Egyptians, the hieroglyphic writings, astrology, the interpretation of dreams, the foretelling of events, magic, and conjuring, and who were regarded as the possessors of secret arts (*vid.* Ex. vii. 11) and the *wise men* of the nation."⁹²⁶
- Divination tries to ascertain the future, and magic seeks to control it. God withheld the Egyptian diviners from comprehending the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams even though the clue to their interpretation lay in the religious symbols of Egypt.
- "For the cow was the symbol of Isis, the goddess of the all-sustaining earth, and in the hieroglyphics it represents the earth, agriculture, and food; and the Nile, by its overflowing, was the source of fertility of the land."⁹²⁷
- Yet these symbols had multiple meanings to the Egyptians, which probably accounts for the difficulty of interpretation.⁹²⁸
- "Seven-year famines were a familiar feature of life in the ancient Near East."⁹²⁹
- 41:9-24 Joseph carefully gave God the glory for his interpretive gift in his response to Pharaoh (v. 16).
- "As far as Joseph was concerned, absolute truthfulness in guarding God's honor was far more important than personal advantages."⁹³⁰
- "Like Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar, he expressly disclaims all ability of himself to unfold the secret counsels of heaven, or exercise that wisdom for which Pharaoh seems very willing to give him credit. The same humility has been in every age a distinguishing ornament of all God's faithful servants."⁹³¹
- 41:25-36 Joseph also presented God as sovereign over Pharaoh (vv. 25, 28). The Egyptians regarded Pharaoh as a divine manifestation in human form. By

⁹²⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 1:349.

⁹²⁷Ibid.

⁹²⁸Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 391.

⁹²⁹Ibid., p. 398.

⁹³⁰Leupold, 2:1025-26.

⁹³¹Bush, 2:277.

accepting Joseph's interpretation of his dreams Pharaoh chose to place himself under Joseph's God. God rewarded this humility by preserving the land of Egypt in the coming famine.

". . . the writer has gone out of his way to present the whole narrative in a series of pairs, all fitting within the notion of the emphasis given by means of the repetition: 'The matter is certain and swift' (v. 32). The repetition of the dreams, then, fits this pattern."⁹³²

"The intention of prophecies concerning judgments to come, is to excite those threatened with them to take proper measures for averting them."⁹³³

"The writer's emphasis on the 'good' and 'evil' represents Joseph's wisdom and discernment as an ability to distinguish between the 'good' (*tob*) and the 'evil' (*ra'*). Such a picture suggests that in the story of Joseph the writer is returning to one of the central themes of the beginning of the book, the knowledge of 'good' (*tob*) and 'evil' (*ra'*). While Joseph is able to discern between 'good and evil,' it is clear from this story that ultimately such knowledge comes only from God (v. 39). Joseph is the embodiment of the ideal that true wisdom, the ability to discern between 'good and evil,' comes only from God. Thus the lesson of the early chapters of Genesis is artfully repeated in these last chapters."⁹³⁴

41:37-45 Pharaoh recognized Joseph as one who had unique supernatural powers (v. 38; cf. Dan. 5:14). He probably did not identify the "spirit" in Joseph as the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. There is no evidence that Pharaoh understood or believed in the God of Israel. Most likely he thought some deity had manifested himself or herself through Joseph.

It was not unknown in Egypt for the Pharaohs to appoint individuals who lacked previous social station or political rank to positions of authority in the government.

"At any time the king would—and did—appoint outsiders. In fact, the noteworthy careers, as preserved for us in tomb inscriptions, broke through all departmental limitations. Men of humble origin could rise to the top once their gifts were recognized; and we find that they were called to a

⁹³²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 214.

⁹³³Bush, 2:281. Cf. von Rad, p. 376.

⁹³⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 240.

succession of posts which would seem to us to have required entirely different preparatory training."⁹³⁵

To naturalize Joseph, Pharaoh gave him an Egyptian name (v. 45; cf. Dan. 1:7) and an Egyptian wife from an appropriate level of society. Joseph's father-in-law was evidently a high-ranking priest in the celebrated temple of the sun located in the city of On (Gr. Heliopolis) 10 miles northeast of modern Cairo.

"The high priest at On held the exalted title 'Greatest of Seers.' Joseph thus marries into the elite of Egyptian nobility."⁹³⁶

Joseph's marriage to an Egyptian seems to have been Pharaoh's order, and God permitted it. The patriarchs generally avoided marriage to Canaanites, but marriage to non-Canaanite Gentiles was less serious. Joseph's wife and in-laws did not turn him away from his faith in Yahweh or his high regard for God's promises to his forefathers (cf. Moses).

41:46-57 The notation of the birth of Joseph's sons is, of course, very significant in view of God's purposes for Abraham's family (vv. 50-52). Joseph acknowledged God's goodness to him in naming both his sons. An allusion to the blessing aspect of the patriarchal promises occurs in verse 49.

"If the name of Joseph's first son (Manasseh) focuses on a God who preserves, the name of Joseph's second son (Ephraim) focuses on a God who blesses."⁹³⁷

Some students of Genesis have wondered why Joseph did not inform Jacob of his welfare quickly since he must have realized that Jacob would have worried about his disappearance.⁹³⁸ In naming Manasseh, Joseph said God had enabled him to forget all (his troubles in) his father's household (v. 51). Perhaps Joseph did not try to contact Jacob because he thought his father had set him up for what happened to him at Dothan.⁹³⁹ This seems very unlikely to me since Jacob's sorrow over Joseph's apparent death seems genuine.

Perhaps Joseph did not try to contact Jacob because through the remarkable events by which God exalted him he came to realize that God

⁹³⁵Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p. 35. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 395-96; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 533.

⁹³⁶Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 288.

⁹³⁷Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 512.

⁹³⁸E.g., Theodoret, an early church father.

⁹³⁹Marc Shapiro, "The Silence of Joseph," *Journal of Reform Judaism* 36:1 (Winter 1989):15-17.

would fulfill the rest of His promises contained in his dreams.⁹⁴⁰ He may have concluded that his best course of action would be to continue to let God take the initiative as He had done so consistently in his life to that time. Joseph had come to trust God in place of his father. In this sense he had forgotten his father's household.

"Forget' does not mean here 'not remember' but rather to have something no longer (cf. Job 39.17; 11:16. See, too, the Arabic proverb, 'Whoever drinks water from the Nile forgets his fatherland if he is a foreigner'). The phrase refers, therefore, more to an objective external fact than to a subjective, psychological process."⁹⁴¹

One might say that for Joseph life in Canaan was a closed chapter of his life.

"Just as Adam is seen in the Creation account as dependent on God for his knowledge of 'good and evil,' so Joseph also is portrayed here in the same terms . . . Just as Adam is made God's 'vicegerent' to rule over all the land, so similarly Joseph is portrayed here as the Pharaoh's 'vicegerent' over all his land (vv. 40-43). As Adam was made in God's image to rule over all the land, so the king here gave Joseph his 'signet ring' and dressed him in royal garments (v. 42). The picture of Joseph resembles the psalmist's understanding of Genesis 1 when, regarding that passage, he writes, '[You have] crowned him with glory and honor./ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;/ you put everything under his feet' (Ps 8:5-7). Just as God provided a wife for Adam in the garden and gave man all the land for his enjoyment, so the king gave a wife to Joseph and put him over all the land (v. 45). . . .

"The picture of Joseph, then, looks back to Adam; but more, it looks forward to one who was yet to come. It anticipates the coming of the one from the house of Judah to whom the kingdom belongs (cf. 49:10). Thus in the final shape of the narrative, the tension between the house of Joseph and the house of Judah, which lies within many of these texts, is resolved by making the life of Joseph into a picture of the one who is to reign from the house of Judah."⁹⁴²

God controls the fortunes of nations to protect and provide for His covenant people.

7. Joseph's brothers' first journey into Egypt ch. 42

Joseph awakened his brothers' guilty consciences when he put his brothers in prison as spies after they had come to Egypt for grain. By keeping Simeon hostage while allowing the others to bring Benjamin back, Joseph pricked their consciences even further.

⁹⁴⁰Delitzsch, 2:306; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 535.

⁹⁴¹von Rad, p. 379.

⁹⁴²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 242. See also idem, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 215.

Joseph treated his brothers as he did to discover how they felt toward Jacob and Benjamin, who had taken Joseph's place in his father's affections. He also did so to see if they had genuinely repented of their sin against himself. He apparently did not act out of revenge, and he was not vindictive. Joseph simply wanted to uncover his brothers' hearts.

"Joseph's tests of his brothers were important in God's plan to channel his blessing through the seed of Abraham. God had planned to bring the family to Egypt so that it might grow into a great nation. But because the people who would form that nation had to be faithful, the brothers needed to be tested before they could share in the blessing. Joseph's prodding had to be subtle; the brothers had to perceive that God was moving against them so that they would acknowledge their crime against Joseph and demonstrate that they had changed. If they failed the test, God could have started over with Joseph, just as he had said he would with Moses in Exodus 32:10, when his wrath was kindled against Israel."⁹⁴³

42:1-7 Twenty-one years after his brothers sold Joseph into slavery they bowed before him in fulfillment of his youthful dreams (vv. 6-7; cf. 37:5-9).⁹⁴⁴

"The time was when Joseph's brethren were men of high respectability in the land of Canaan, whilst Joseph himself was a slave or a prisoner in the land of Egypt. Now, by a signal reverse, Joseph was governor over all the land of Egypt, while they appeared before him as humble suppliants, almost craving as an alms those supplies of food for which they were both able and willing to pay the price demanded."⁹⁴⁵

"The double identification of Joseph as *hassallit* [administrator] and *hammasbir* [dispenser] recall Joseph's two earlier dreams, the one in which the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed before him (his position of authority), and the other in which the brothers' sheaves bowed before his sheaf (his position of provider)."⁹⁴⁶

People who sell their brother into slavery are not trustworthy. Therefore Joseph retained power over his brothers until he could trust them.

⁹⁴³Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 647.

⁹⁴⁴Ronald T. Hyman analyzed Joseph's skillful use of questions to uncover his brothers' attitudes and intentions as well as the key role of questions in the whole Joseph narrative—there are 30 to 40 of them—in, "Questions in the Joseph Story: The Effects and Their Implications for Teaching," *Religious Education* (Summer 1984):437-55.

⁹⁴⁵Bush, 2:298.

⁹⁴⁶Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 519. Cf. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 163.

The chiasmic structure of verses 7-24 focuses attention on the brothers' imprisonment.

- "A Joseph knew his brothers and remembered (7-9a).
 B Joseph accused them of being spies, but they explained their situation (9b-13).
 C Joseph set out a test whereby they could prove they were honest men (14-16).
 D Joseph put them in prison (17).
 C' Joseph set out a new test for the brothers to prove they were honest (18-20).
 B' The brothers confessed their guilt concerning their brother, and Reuben accused them of their fault (21-22).
 A' Joseph understood and wept (23-24)."⁹⁴⁷

42:8-17 Joseph remembered his dreams (v. 9), and the proof of God's faithfulness undoubtedly encouraged his confidence as he proceeded to deal with his brothers. He played a role before them charging them with a crime punishable with death in Egypt. Such a serious accusation encouraged his brothers to be as honest as possible, which is what Joseph wanted.

A family will rarely risk almost all of its sons in a dangerous spying mission, which probably explains the brothers' statement that they were all sons of one man (v. 11).

Probably Joseph wanted to be sure that his brothers had not killed Benjamin since they had contemplated killing himself (v. 15).

The three-day imprisonment provided Joseph with time to plan his strategy, and it impressed the brothers with the importance of cooperating with Joseph (v. 17). These three days also gave the brothers a taste of what Joseph had endured for three years. Joseph may have intended that they serve one day's imprisonment for each year he had suffered incarceration because of their hatred.

"A vindictive Joseph could have dismayed his brothers with worthless sackloads, or tantalized them at his feast as they had tantalized him (37:24, 25); his enigmatic gifts were a kinder and more searching test. Just how well-judged was his policy can be seen in the growth of quite new attitudes in the brothers, as the alternating sun and frost broke them open to God."⁹⁴⁸

42:18-24 Joseph's profession of faith in God (Elohim) told his brothers that he realized he was under divine authority and therefore would be fair with them.

⁹⁴⁷Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 649.

⁹⁴⁸Kidner, p. 199. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 542.

The brothers saw divine retribution in what had happened to them (vv. 21-23). The brothers confessed their guilt in dealing with Joseph as they had done in his hearing. However, Joseph wanted to assure himself that they had also borne the fruits of genuine repentance (i.e., taken a different course of action with Benjamin and Jacob). Therefore he did not reveal himself to them at this time.

Joseph's heart had not become hard toward his brothers because of their treatment of him. He did not hate them (v. 24).

"There is nothing more striking in the character of Joseph than the utter absence of revengeful feeling, whether it was against his brothers, or against Potiphar, or against the chief butler."⁹⁴⁹

Rather his heart remained tender, and his brothers' confession moved him. Reuben as the eldest and most responsible son would have been the logical choice to retain as a hostage. Yet because Reuben had talked his brothers out of killing Joseph, Joseph passed him over and selected Simeon who was the next oldest. Perhaps Joseph also remembered Simeon's cruelty (34:25; cf. 49:5-7).

42:25-28 Joseph restored his brothers' money to them out of the goodness of his heart. His gracious act would satisfy their needs but also cause them to search their souls further as they contemplated the consequences of their good fortune. When they first discovered the money in one of their sacks, they regarded what God was doing to them as a divine punishment (v. 28). This is the first time the brothers mentioned God. Their aroused consciences saw God at work behind what they were experiencing (cf. vv. 21-22).

"'Silver, money' (*keseeph*) is mentioned twenty times (42:25—45:22). In the first scene of Act 1 [37:2-36], the brothers put a total of twenty pieces of silver before a brother (37:28). Now they put their brother over a fortune in silver. As might be expected in an act about family reconciliation [42:1—46:27], other key words are 'brother' (ca. 50x) and 'father' (ca. 40x)."⁹⁵⁰

42:29-38 Each time Jacob's sons had left home they returned with more money but minus a brother (chs. 37, 42).⁹⁵¹ Did Jacob think they had sold Simeon?

"Joseph's brothers soften the news considerably, making it sound like Simeon was a guest of Joseph . . . instead of

⁹⁴⁹Thomas, p. 407.

⁹⁵⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 541-42.

⁹⁵¹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 535.

being bound in prison. They do not mention the threat of death and do not at this time speak of the money in the one sack."⁹⁵²

The money in the sack widened the breach between Jacob and his sons but drew the brothers closer together. Jacob despaired because he distrusted his sons and the Egyptian ruler, and he had forgotten the promises of God (v. 36). He therefore concluded that, "All these things are against me." In reality God was causing all those things to work for Jacob (cf. Rom. 8:28). He would soon realize God's blessing.

"A great portion of our present trouble arises from our not knowing the whole truth."⁹⁵³

Reuben's offer of his two sons was pathetically weak (v. 37). He claimed willingness to suffer in Jacob's place, but would he really put his own sons before his brother? And how would killing Jacob's grandsons console Jacob? It is no wonder that Jacob declined Reuben's offer (v. 38).

Throughout this chapter we can observe the attitude of Joseph's brothers changing. Faced with a personal crisis they acknowledged their guilt. They regarded their suffering as righteous divine punishment, and they began to place Jacob's interests above their own. However their repentance was not yet complete. The process of contrition had to run further before reconciliation was possible.⁹⁵⁴

When believers have unresolved guilt in their hearts, God often convicts their consciences to discover if they are spiritually sensitive enough to participate in His program.

8. Joseph's brothers' second journey into Egypt ch. 43

Chapters 43—45 are a unit describing what happened when Joseph's brothers returned to Egypt. Like chapter 42, which it echoes, it consists of seven scenes arranged palistrophically with the central scene being the arrest of Joseph's brothers (44:1-13).

- A** Jacob sends his sons to Egypt (43:1-14).
- B** Arrival in Egypt; the steward and the brothers (43:15-25)
- C** Lunch with Joseph (43:26-34)
- D** The brothers arrested (44:1-13)
- C'** Joseph's self-disclosure (44:14—45:15)
- B'** Departure from Egypt; Pharaoh and the brothers (45:16-24)
- A'** Jacob receives his sons' report (45:25-28).⁹⁵⁵

⁹⁵²The NET Bible note on 42:34.

⁹⁵³Bush, 2:309.

⁹⁵⁴See Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 550, for further development of the "severe mercies" God used to heal Jacob's fractured family.

⁹⁵⁵Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 418-19.

Upon returning to Canaan the brothers had to persuade Jacob to let Benjamin accompany them on their next trip to Egypt, which they did with considerable difficulty. When they went back to Egypt and tried to return the money they had found in their sacks, Joseph received them graciously and dealt with them peacefully. He also showered Benjamin with lavish favoritism to test his brothers for jealousy.

43:1-15 Judah evidently took the lead and spoke for his brothers because Jacob had already refused Reuben (42:37-38), Simeon was in Egypt, and Levi had previously forfeited his father's confidence (ch. 34). As Reuben had done (42:37), Judah offered to bear responsibility in Jacob's place, but in contrast to Reuben, Judah took personal responsibility for Benjamin's safety (v. 9). From this point on, Judah becomes the leader of the sons of Jacob (cf. 49:8-10; Matt. 1:2, 17; Luke 3:23, 33).

Facing a crisis like his meeting with Esau (chs. 32—33), Jacob again prepared a lavish present to appease "the man," Joseph.

"Jacob has no guarantee El Shaddai will do anything. His *if I am to be bereaved, bereaved I shall be* is the same construction as Esther's 'if I perish, I perish' (Est. 4:16) . . ."956

"The 'and Benjamin' [v. 15] hangs like the resigned sigh of a father trapped between the need to live and the possibility of a life made utterly empty through another loss."⁹⁵⁷

43:16-25 A better translation of, "I had your money," (v. 23) is, "Your money had come to me." Joseph was not lying to his brothers.

43:26-34 Again the brothers fulfilled God's prophecy in Joseph's dreams by bowing before Joseph (vv. 26-28; cf. 37:5-9).

Benjamin was 16 years younger than Joseph, so he would have been 23 at this time (v. 29). Joseph was 39 (41:46; 45:6).

". . . according to the prevailing custom of the East, the very fact that they had been invited to Joseph's table was in itself an encouraging circumstance. Though the Orientals are for the most part a revengeful people, yet if you eat with them, you are thenceforward sure of having their protection. Even should you have done them the greatest injury, yet you need be under no apprehension from their resentment."⁹⁵⁸

⁹⁵⁶Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 545. See also S. B. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes, and Structure*, pp. 123-42, for linguistic and thematic parallels between Esther and the Joseph story. Compare also Rebekah's complaint when she thought she might lose both Jacob and Esau (27:45).

⁹⁵⁷W. L. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study*, p. 45.

⁹⁵⁸Bush, 2:316.

The caste system in Egypt required that Joseph as a member of the upper class eat at a table separate from his Egyptian companions. The Hebrews sat at a third table since they were foreigners (v. 32). The Hebrews and other foreigners ate animals that the Egyptians regarded as sacred. The Egyptians also followed strict rules for the ceremonial cleansing of their food before they ate it. This made the Hebrews "loathsome" to the Egyptians.⁹⁵⁹ This segregation later allowed the Israelites to develop into a numerous nation within the borders of Egypt.

Joseph hosted a meal for his brothers who years before had callously sat down to eat while he languished in a pit.⁹⁶⁰ Joseph showed respect to Benjamin as his distinguished guest by giving him larger and better servings of food than his brothers received (v. 34). Special honorees frequently received double portions, but a fivefold portion was the sign of highest privilege. With this favor Joseph sought not only to honor Benjamin but also to test his other brothers' feelings toward Benjamin. He wanted to see if they would hate him as they had hated himself, his father's former favorite. Evidently they passed this test.

"Coming forth from this crucible, the formerly callous brothers emerge a bonded family, shining with integrity and love toward one another. . ."⁹⁶¹

"Those who would participate in God's program must be willing to take responsibility for their actions, make restitution when they are culpable, and accept their lot gratefully and without jealousy."⁹⁶²

9. Joseph's last test and its results ch. 44

Joseph next tested his brother's loyalty to Benjamin by framing Benjamin and charging him with stealing Joseph's cup. These events prompted the brothers to acknowledge that God was punishing them for their treatment of Joseph many years earlier. Judah's plea for Benjamin voiced the genuineness of the brothers' loyalty to Benjamin. It contrasts with their former disloyalty to Joseph.

Joseph wanted to discover if his brothers would sell Benjamin as a slave as they had sold him and possibly kill Jacob with sorrow. Their other alternative was to submit to slavery for Benjamin's sake. This discovery seems to have been the object of Joseph's actions as Moses related them in this chapter. As God had tested the genuineness of Abraham's faith (22:1), so Joseph tested the genuineness of his brothers' repentance.

⁹⁵⁹See also the note on 46:34.

⁹⁶⁰Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 302.

⁹⁶¹Waltek, *Genesis*, p. 557.

⁹⁶²Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 662.

- 44:1-5 That Joseph practiced divination is not clear from verse 5 or verse 15. He may have, but this seems inconsistent with his character as a man of faith in Yahweh.⁹⁶³ It also seems unlikely since Joseph had the gift of interpreting dreams (divine revelations) from God. If anyone needed to resort to divination it would not have been Joseph. The first statement made by Joseph's servant may have been a lie (v. 5). The second statement made by Joseph did not claim to practice divination (v. 15). Joseph said that such a person as he could do it.⁹⁶⁴ These references to divination seem intended to impress Joseph's brothers with the value of the cup that had disappeared. The brothers inferred that Joseph used it for purposes other than simply drinking.
- 44:6-13 The brothers' promise was not only rash but foolish since the contents of their sacks had surprised them previously (v. 9). Years earlier Laban had searched through Jacob's possessions for his teraphim that remained hidden in Rachel's tent. Jacob had pronounced a death sentence on the guilty person (cf. 31:23, 25, 33, 35). Now the Egyptians searched for Joseph's cup of divination and found it in the sack of Benjamin, Rachel's son. The brothers here also pronounced a death sentence on the guilty person.
- Joseph's steward did not hold the brothers to their promise but simply stated that the "guilty" person would become a slave (v. 10). Joseph had set his brothers up with a perfect excuse to abandon Benjamin and free themselves from slavery.
- Tearing one's clothing was a sign of great personal distress in the ancient Near East (v. 13; cf. 37:29). Here it expressed the brothers' sincere agony at the prospect of having to turn Benjamin over to the Egyptians and return to Jacob only to break his heart. They tore their clothes, as Jacob had done when he received news of Joseph's apparent death (37:34). The brothers did not suspect that they were the victims of fraud any more than Jacob did when his sons gave him Joseph's bloody coat.⁹⁶⁵
- 44:14-17 Judah acted as spokesman because he had promised Jacob that he would take responsibility for Benjamin's safety (v. 16; cf. 43:8-9). Judah regarded this turn of events as divine condemnation for the brothers' treatment of Joseph and Jacob years earlier.⁹⁶⁶ Really it was divine discipline that God designed to produce repentance. Judah did not try to get rid of the privileged son this time. Instead he volunteered to share his fate at great personal sacrifice.

⁹⁶³Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 559, believed Joseph's claim was just part of the ruse.

⁹⁶⁴Wood, *The Prophets . . .*, pp. 32-33, believed that Joseph meant that he had information not available to ordinary people. The Hebrew verb in both verses 5 and 15 is *nahash* (to whisper, mumble formulations, prophesy), not *qasam*, the word normally translated "to divine."

⁹⁶⁵Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 564.

⁹⁶⁶See D. Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law*, pp. 248-55; Sternberg, p. 306.

Joseph allowed Judah and the other brothers to depart and return home without Benjamin (v. 17). However Judah's refusal to do so demonstrated the sincerity of the brothers' repentance.

44:18-34 Judah explained the whole story. He did not try to hide or excuse the brothers' guilt. This is the longest speech in Genesis. Key words are "servant" (10 times), "my lord" (7 times), and "father" (13 times).

"No orator ever pronounced a more moving oration."⁹⁶⁷

"I would give very much to be able to pray before our Lord God as well as Judah prays here before Joseph. For this is a perfect pattern of prayer, yes, of the true feeling which should be in a prayer."⁹⁶⁸

Jacob had not changed; he still doted on his youngest son. However the brothers had changed; they now loved their father and Benjamin. Judah manifested concern for Jacob as well as Benjamin (v. 31). Rather than hating their father for favoring Joseph and then Benjamin, the brothers were now working for his welfare. The supreme proof of Judah's repentance was his willingness to trade places with Benjamin and remain in Egypt as a slave (vv. 33-34; cf. John 15:13). This is the first instance of human substitution in Scripture.

"A spiritual metamorphosis for the better has certainly taken place in Judah. . . . He who once callously engineered the selling of Joseph to strangers out of envy and anger is now willing to become Joseph's slave so that the rest of his brothers, and especially Benjamin [whom Jacob loved more than Judah], may be freed and allowed to return to Canaan to rejoin their father."⁹⁶⁹

"Jacob will crown Judah with kingship [49:10] because he demonstrates that he has become fit to rule according to God's ideal of kingship that the king serves the people, not vice versa. Judah is transformed from one who sells his brother as a slave to one who is willing to be the slave for his brother. With that offer he exemplifies Israel's ideal kingship."⁹⁷⁰

⁹⁶⁷Bush, 2:329.

⁹⁶⁸Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 7:368.

⁹⁶⁹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 570. Jesus Christ, Judah's descendant, demonstrated the same attitude.

⁹⁷⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 567.

God teaches His people to be loyal to one another by convicting them of previous disloyalty to get them to love one another unselfishly. Such self-sacrificing love is essential for the leaders of God's people.

10. Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers 45:1-15

Joseph emotionally revealed his identity to his brothers. He assured them of God's sovereign control of his life and directed them to bring Jacob to Egypt. He then demonstrated his love for his brothers warmly.

This is one of the most dramatic recognition scenes in all literature.

Judah so impressed Joseph with the sincerity of his repentance and the tenderness of his affection that Joseph broke down completely. He wept tears of joy uncontrollably (vv. 1-2; cf. 2 Sam. 13:9).

Joseph then explained his perspective on his brothers' treatment of him. He had discerned God's providential control of the events of his life. Four times he stated that God, not his brothers, was behind what had happened (vv. 5, 7, 8, 9).

"This statement . . . is the theological heart of the account of Jacob's line (see 50:19-21; Acts 7:9-10). God directs the maze of human guilt to achieve his good and set purposes (Acts 2:23; 4:28). Such faith establishes the redemptive kingdom of God."⁹⁷¹

"It is divine sovereignty that undergirds the optimism of Genesis. 'God sent me to *preserve life*,' says Joseph."⁹⁷²

"Happy is the man whose eye is open to see the hand of God in every-day events, for to him life always possesses a wonderful and true joy and glory."⁹⁷³

Part of God's purpose was to use Joseph to preserve the house of Israel through the famine (v. 7).

"In using terms like *remnant* and *survivors*, Joseph is employing words that elsewhere in the OT are freighted with theological significance. It may well be that in the deliverance of his brothers and his father Joseph perceives that far more is at stake than the mere physical survival of twelve human beings. What really survives is the plan of redemption announced first to his great grandfather."⁹⁷⁴

⁹⁷¹Ibid., p. 563.

⁹⁷²Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 433.

⁹⁷³Thomas, pp. 379-80.

⁹⁷⁴Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 576.

Joseph called God "Ha Elohim," the personal God, the God of their fathers (v. 8).

"The theme of divine providential care is put into words by Joseph himself (45:7-8; 50:20), summing up the whole patriarchal story."⁹⁷⁵

Joseph had evidently been planning for his father's family to move down to Egypt if or when his brothers would prove that their attitude had changed (v. 10). Goshen (a Semitic rather than an Egyptian name) was the most fertile part of Egypt (cf. v. 18). It lay in the delta region northeast of the Egyptian capital, Memphis.

Joseph then embraced Benjamin and all his brothers to express his love and to confirm his forgiveness (vv. 14-15). The writer highlighted the genuine reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers by recording that they talked with him (v. 15). Much earlier they could not speak to him (37:4).

After a threefold expression of Joseph's goodwill toward his siblings (weeping, explaining, and embracing), the shocked and fearful brothers gained the courage to speak. They now recognized Joseph as the one they had so cruelly abused and who was now able to crush them if he chose to do so.

Outstanding in this section is the way in which Joseph's perception of God's ways made him gracious, forgiving, and accepting rather than bitter and vindictive. He saw the love of his God behind the cruelty of his brothers. He had accepted all that had come to him as the will of God, and therefore he experienced the blessing of God.

Reconciliation is possible when there is forgiveness, and forgiveness is possible when there is recognition of God's sovereignty.

"Some have questioned the morality of Yosef's actions, seeing that the aged Yaakov might well have died while the test was progressing, without ever finding out that Yosef had survived. But that is not the point of the story. What it is trying to teach (among other things) is a lesson about crime and repentance. Only by recreating something of the original situation—the brothers are again in control of the life and death of a son of Rachel—can Yosef be sure that they have changed. Once the brothers pass the test, life and covenant can then continue."⁹⁷⁶

Though the Bible never identifies Joseph as a type of Christ, the many analogies are significant. Both were special objects of their father's love. Their brethren hated them both, rejected their superior claims, and conspired to kill them. Both became a blessing to the Gentiles. Both received a bride. Joseph reconciled with his brethren and exalted them, and so will Christ.

⁹⁷⁵Whybray, p. 5.

⁹⁷⁶E. Fox, *In the Beginning*, p. 202.

11. Israel's move to Egypt 45:16—46:30

Joseph's brothers returned to Jacob with news of Joseph's survival and prosperity. Israel (Jacob) then moved to Egypt in response to Joseph's invitation and God's encouragement. The survival of Jacob's family in Egypt through the famine recalls the survival of Noah's family in the ark through the Flood.

Israel's decision to move to Egypt 45:16-28

Pharaoh's invitation was as generous as it was because Pharaoh held Joseph in high regard. This is another excellent example of hospitality: giving the best that one has to a starving and needy family. Pharaoh's invitation was an invitation, not a command. Pharaoh had no authority to command Jacob to move into Egypt. Jacob was free to accept or reject this offer. If Jacob chose to accept it, he would be free to return to Canaan whenever he chose. The fact that Jacob's family could not leave Egypt once they settled there was due to a new Pharaoh's new policies concerning the Israelites as residents of Egypt. It was not due to the action of this Pharaoh (Sesostris III).

"... when Pharaoh restates Joseph's offer and 'twice' gives the brothers the 'good' (vv. 18, 20) of the land of Egypt, it is hard not to see in the purpose of this narrative a conscious allusion to the 'good' (1:31) land given to Adam in Genesis 1. The picture of Joseph is a picture of restoration—not just the restoration of the good fortune of Jacob, but, as a picture, the restoration of the blessing that was promised through the seed of Jacob. This picture is also a blueprint for the hope that lies for the people of Israel at the end of the Pentateuch. They are to go into the land and enjoy it as God's good gift (e.g., Dt 30:5)."⁹⁷⁷

Joseph's admonition to his brothers not to quarrel on their journey (v. 24) is a bit unclear. Probably he meant just that, not to become involved in arguing and recriminations over the past (cf. Prov. 29:9). Since Joseph had forgiven them, they should forgive one another (cf. Matt. 18:21-35). However the usual meaning of the Hebrew word is to fear (cf. Exod. 15:14). So part of his meaning may be that they should not be afraid of robbers as they returned to Canaan or fearful of returning to Egypt in the future.⁹⁷⁸

Jacob had suffered as a victim of his sons' deception and malice. He had also suffered because of his own failure to cling to the promises that God had given to his forefathers, himself, and Joseph in his dreams. Jacob always had difficulty believing without seeing. Nevertheless when he believed that Joseph was alive and ruling over Egypt, his spirit revived and he returned to a position of trust in God. For this reason Moses called him Israel again in the text (v. 28).⁹⁷⁹

⁹⁷⁷Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 223.

⁹⁷⁸Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 430.

⁹⁷⁹Often in Genesis a final comment by a chief actor in the drama anticipates the next scene, as here.

"Both Abraham and Jacob figuratively receive their sons back from the dead. Both sons prefigure the death and resurrection of Christ, but Joseph even more so. Both are not only alive but rulers over all (cf. Acts 2:32-34; Phil. 2:6-11). Jacob's response on hearing the incredibly good news prefigures the response of the disciples when the women tell them that Christ is alive, having been raised from the dead. They too greet the news at first with stunned disbelief and finally with unspeakable joy when it is proved with many infallible proofs (cf. Luke 24:9-49; John 21:1-9, 24-25; Acts 1:3). Their faith, like Jacob's, revives them, reorients their lives, and makes them pilgrims venturing from land plagued by famine to the best land imaginable."⁹⁸⁰

God's encouragement to move 46:1-7

The structure of chapters 46 and 47 is also chiasmatic.⁹⁸¹

- A God appears to Jacob (46:1-4)
- B Jacob journeys to Egypt (46:5-27)
- C Joseph meets Jacob (46:28-34)
- D Joseph's brothers meet Pharaoh (47:1-6)
- C' Jacob meets Pharaoh (47:7-10)
- B' Joseph cares for his family and Egypt (47:11-26)
- A' Jacob prepares to die (47:27-31)

Beersheba lay on the southern border of Canaan (v. 1). Jacob and his caravan stopped there to offer sacrifices to Yahweh. Abraham had planted a tamarisk tree there and called on the name of the Lord (21:33). Isaac had also built an altar there and called on the Lord after God had appeared to him (26:24-25). It was perhaps at this altar that Jacob now presented his sacrifices. Jacob must have had mixed feelings as he looked forward to seeing Joseph again. At the same time he realized he was leaving the land promised to his family by God. This move was as momentous for Jacob as Abram's journey from Ur (12:1-3), Jacob's flight to Paddan-aram (28:1-22), or his return to Canaan (31:3-54), all of which God encouraged with visions.

"In addressing God as *God of his father* he was acknowledging the family calling, and implicitly seeking leave to move out of Canaan. His attitude was very different from that of Abram in 12:10ff."⁹⁸²

Jacob was probably aware of the prophecy that Abraham's descendants would experience slavery in a foreign land for 400 years (15:13). Consequently he must have found it even more difficult to cross into Egypt (vv. 2-4). God revealed Himself to Jacob (the sixth time) here to assure Jacob that this move was in harmony with His will for Jacob and his family. This is one of four "do not be afraid" consolations that God gave in Genesis (v. 3; cf. 15:1; 21:17; 26:24).

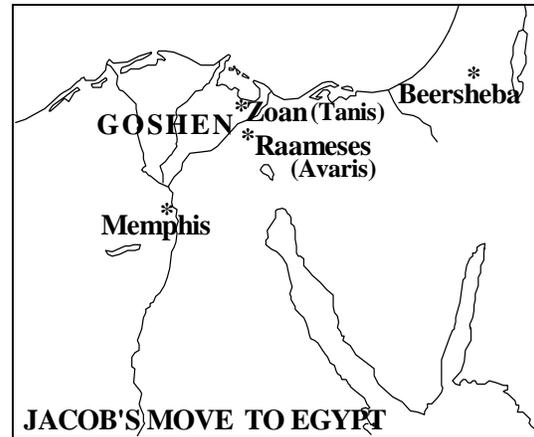
⁹⁸⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 578.

⁹⁸¹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 439.

⁹⁸²Kidner, p. 208. Cf. Gen. 26:24; 28:13-15; 32:9.

God promised to make Jacob's family a great nation in Egypt (cf. 12:2; 15:13-14; 17:6, 20; 18:18; 21:13-8). Because of the Egyptians' disdain for Hebrew shepherds Jacob's family was not in danger of suffering amalgamation into Egyptian life as they had been in danger of being absorbed into Canaanite life.

The Israelites' removal to Egypt was also a divine discipline. Jacob's sons had failed to stay separate from the Canaanites so God temporarily removed them from the land He had promised them.⁹⁸³



God promised to go with Jacob into Egypt (v. 4). Egypt was the womb God used to form His nation.⁹⁸⁴ Though Jacob was leaving God's land he was not leaving God behind. God further promised to bring Jacob back into the land. He did this by bringing his descendants back 400 years later and by bringing Jacob personally back for burial in the land (50:1-21). Moreover God promised that Jacob would not die until he had seen Joseph implying that Joseph would be present when Jacob died (49:29-33). "Joseph will close your eyes" (v. 4) refers to a custom that Jews still practice. The eldest son or closest relative would gently close the eyes of the deceased.⁹⁸⁵

"Jacob's decidedly dysfunctional family is on the verge of coming together again in genuine community."⁹⁸⁶

Israel's household's move to Egypt 46:8-27

This section contains a list of the individuals in Jacob's family about the time he moved to Egypt. As in chapter 31, where he left Paddan-aram, this move was also difficult for Jacob. Moses recorded a total of 70 persons (v. 27; cf. Exod. 1:5). The 66 referred to in verse 26 excluded Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh. Stephen said there were 75, but he must have added Joseph's three grandsons and two great-grandsons (Acts 7:14). These five were born later.

". . . according to a view which we frequently meet with in the Old Testament, though strange to our modes of thought, [they] came into Egypt *in lumbus patrum* [i.e., in the loins of their father]."⁹⁸⁷

"It [verse 8] means: shortly after the children of Israel had come to Egypt there were to be found those seventy fathers from whom were derived the

⁹⁸³Note the parallels with Esau's migration to Seir (cf. 36:2-8 and 46:8—47:27).

⁹⁸⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 574.

⁹⁸⁵Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 313.

⁹⁸⁶Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 593.

⁹⁸⁷Keil and Delitzsch, 1:371.

seventy clans that were the prevailing clans throughout Israel's early history."⁹⁸⁸

This was the humble beginning of the great nation of Israel.

"It can hardly go without notice that the number of nations in Genesis 10 is also 'seventy.' Just as the 'seventy nations' represent all the descendants of Adam, so now the 'seventy sons' represent all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the children of Israel. Here in narrative form is a demonstration of the theme in Deuteronomy 32:8 that God apportioned the boundaries of the nations (Ge 10) according to the number of the children of Israel. Thus the writer has gone to great lengths to portray the new nation of Israel as a new humanity and Abraham as a second Adam. The blessing that is to come through Abraham and his seed is a restoration of the original blessing of Adam, a blessing which was lost in the Fall."⁹⁸⁹

Israel's reunion with Joseph 46:28-30

This reunion recalls Jacob's former meeting with Esau (32:3). In both situations after a long period of separation Jacob sent a party ahead to meet the relative.

"The land of Goshen, where the Hebrews lived, adjoined Avaris—now known to have been sited at Tell el-Dab'a (*not* at Tanis, as so many textbooks wrongly aver)."⁹⁹⁰

Jacob had said that the loss of his sons would bring him to his grave in mourning (37:35; 42:38). Joseph's "resurrection" had enabled his father to die in peace. Similarly the resurrection of a greater Joseph has allowed many to face death with courage and hope (cf. Phil. 1:21-26; 1 Pet. 1:3).

Joseph encouraged his family to be completely honest with Pharaoh (v. 34). Dishonesty long plagued Jacob's family, but now Joseph led them out of this destructive behavior.

Believers should respond to divine providence by making their decisions in response to the initiative of His wise leaders. They should do so with confidence in His promises and dependent on His continuing guidance and provision.

12. Joseph's wise leadership 46:31—47:27

As a result of Joseph presenting his family members to Pharaoh, they received the best of Egypt's land. Jacob blessed Pharaoh in return for his goodness. In the years that followed,

⁹⁸⁸Leupold, 2:1115.

⁹⁸⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 225.

⁹⁹⁰Kitchen, *The Bible . . .*, p. 76. This opinion rests on belief in a late date for the Exodus in the thirteenth century B.C., however, and may not be correct.

Joseph bought almost all of Egypt for Pharaoh, saved the Egyptians' lives, and furthered Israel's prosperity and blessing. Through him all the nations near Egypt also received blessing (cf. 12:3).

God's provision of land and food for Israel 46:31—47:12

The major purpose of this section is probably to show how God sustained and blessed Jacob's family in Egypt during the remaining five years of the famine (cf. vv. 12-13). It is also to demonstrate how He partially fulfilled His promises to the patriarchs to make them a blessing to the whole world (v. 25) as well as fruitful and numerous (v. 27).

46:31-34 Egyptians loathed shepherds because agriculture was the basis of Egyptian society and the Nile River sustained it (v. 34). The Egyptians organized their fields carefully and controlled them relatively easily. The comparative difficulty of controlling sheep, goats, and cows led the Egyptians to think of those who cared for these animals as crude and barbaric.⁹⁹¹ Probably too the more civilized Egyptians distrusted any nomadic peoples.⁹⁹² This resulted in the Israelites living separate from the Egyptians where they increased and developed a distinct national identity and vocation as God had promised.

"Rameses III is said to have employed 3,264 men, mostly foreigners, to take care of his herds."⁹⁹³

47:1-12 Jacob's blessing of Pharaoh (vv. 7, 10) is unusual since it implies that in one sense (i.e., as one of God's elect) Jacob was superior to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was a man of immense worldly power and influence. "The lesser is blessed by the greater" (Heb. 7:7).

"The least and most faltering of God's children has the superiority . . . in the presence of the most elevated men of the world."⁹⁹⁴

Jacob seems to have described his life as a sojourn (v. 9) primarily because he had not come into final possession of the Promised Land. He had, of course, also lived in widely separated places during his lifetime: Paddan-aram, Canaan, and now Egypt. His years were fewer than his fathers: 130 compared with Abraham's 175 and Isaac's 180. This comparison also suggests that neither Abraham nor Isaac had experienced the difficulties and distress that Jacob had during his lifetime.

⁹⁹¹See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:374-75, and my note on 43:32.

⁹⁹²Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 445.

⁹⁹³Ibid., p. 446.

⁹⁹⁴Darby, 1:78.

"When we first encountered Jacob he was struggling inside his mother's womb with his twin brother. As we come to the end of Jacob's life, he is struggling for his life in a famine-devastated Canaan. In between these first and last moments of struggle have been many trying experiences for Jacob. His life has had more sorrow than joy."⁹⁹⁵

"These words [v. 9] appear to be the author's attempt at a deliberate contrast to the later promise that one who honors his father and mother should 'live long and do well upon the land' (Dt 5:15 [*sic* 16]). Jacob, who deceived his father and thereby gained the blessing, must not only die outside the Promised Land but also, we learn here, his years were few and difficult. From his own words, then, we can see a final recompense for Jacob's actions earlier in the book."⁹⁹⁶

Moses called the area where Jacob's family settled the land of Rameses here rather than Goshen (v. 11). The "land of Rameses" could have been another name for Goshen, or a larger area encompassing Goshen, or a district within Goshen.

The use of the name "Rameses" here and elsewhere (Exod. 1:11; 12:37; Num. 33:3, 5) has become a kind of "red herring" for many interpreters. It has led them to conclude that these events occurred after one of the Pharaohs named Rameses lived.⁹⁹⁷ However the biblical chronological references (1 Kings 6:1; Exod. 12:40; et al.) point to a date for Israel's move to Egypt near 1876 B.C. How can we account for the use of the name Rameses here then?

It is possible that the name Rameses (also spelled Raamses) was in use when Jacob entered Egypt even though extra-biblical references have not confirmed this. "Raamses" simply means "Ra [the sun god] has created it."⁹⁹⁸ Second, Rameses may have been the name of this district later, in Moses' day, when he wrote Genesis. He could have used the modern name when writing Genesis rather than an older one that was in use in Jacob's day. A third possibility is that Rameses was the district name even later in history (e.g., after Pharaoh Rameses). A later scribe may have substituted Rameses for an older name that was in use when Moses wrote or when Jacob entered Egypt.⁹⁹⁹

⁹⁹⁵Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 612.

⁹⁹⁶Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 227.

⁹⁹⁷Rameses I reigned about 1347-1320 B.C.

⁹⁹⁸*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 1939 ed., s.v. "Raamses," by C. R. Conder.

⁹⁹⁹Other late names appear in Genesis. For example, the town of Dan (14:14), formerly Laish (Judg. 18:29), received the name Dan during the judges period (ca. 1350-1050 B.C.). Evidently someone after Moses' day substituted the modern name Dan for the older name in Genesis 14:14. This may account for references to the Philistines in Genesis too.

"How different is Jacob's descent to Egypt from his grandfather's (ch. 12)! Both seek out the safety of Egypt because of famine. To save himself Abraham engages in deceit. To save his family Jacob engages in blessing. The Pharaoh at Abraham's visit was only too happy to see Abraham return to his own country. The Pharaoh at Jacob's visit insists that Jacob stay and settle on some choice land. Abraham retreats from Egypt. For Jacob Egypt is his new home. Abraham leaves Egypt alive (and happy to be so!). Jacob will leave Egypt dead."¹⁰⁰⁰

God's provision of land and food for Pharaoh 47:13-27

This section demonstrates the fulfillment of Jacob's blessing on Pharaoh (46:31—47:6 and 47:7-10). Joseph was able to save Egypt and its neighbors from a very severe famine and to alleviate the desperate plight of the Egyptians. Pharaoh received money from Egypt and Canaan (vv. 13-14), livestock (vv. 15-17), land and slaves (vv. 18-21, 23, 25), and 20 percent of future harvests (vv. 23-26). Such a tax was not out of line with what was common in that day in the ancient Near East. Really it was small since the average was 33 and one third percent.¹⁰⁰¹ God blessed Pharaoh because he had blessed the Israelites with the best of Egypt. Later, in Moses' time, God cursed another Pharaoh because he had dealt harshly with the Israelites (cf. 12:3).

"This entire situation informs the meaning of Exodus 1:8-11, which states that a new king came to power who did not know Joseph. Consequently—and ironically—that king began to enslave the Israelites to work in his projects. Had he remembered Joseph, he would have realized how loyal and faithful Israel could be in their sojourn in the land. Because this Pharaoh treated Israel well, they flourished, and he became powerful and wealthy; but because that new king treated Israel harshly, he would have none of the blessing of God, nor would he be able to hinder the prosperity of the people of God. From the beginning to the end of the Egyptian sojourn, prosperity and growth came from God's blessing. Those who acknowledged it shared in it."¹⁰⁰²

47:13-19 "It was axiomatic in the ancient world that one paid one's way so long as one had anything to part with—including, in the last resort, one's liberty."¹⁰⁰³

¹⁰⁰⁰Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 613.

¹⁰⁰¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 591; Thomas, pp. 451-52. See Brian Alexander McKenzie, "Jacob's Blessing of Pharaoh: An Interpretation of Gen. 46:31—47:26," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (Fall 1983):386-99.

¹⁰⁰²Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 687. Cf. 12:3.

¹⁰⁰³Kidner, p. 211.

This is the first mention of horses in the Bible, the primary beast of burden and military machine (v. 17). Egypt was an important source of horses in Solomon's day (cf. 1 Kings 10:28-29).

47:20-26 Early Greek writers as well as monument evidence seem to confirm Joseph's political reforms and redistribution of land in Egypt.¹⁰⁰⁴ In a very real sense Joseph became a savior of the Gentiles as well as the Jews.¹⁰⁰⁵

47:27 Under Joseph's administration Israel prospered, in contrast to Egypt, and increased in number without suffering deprivation or loss of independence. God's promise to increase the seed of the patriarchs was taking shape under Joseph's rule.

A wise leader knows that prosperity comes only from God so he makes decisions in harmony with what God has revealed about how He has promised to bless.

13. Jacob's worship in Egypt 47:28—48:22

Jacob demonstrated his faith in God's promises by demanding that his sons bury him in the Promised Land. He showed he had learned that God will bless those He chooses to bless by blessing the younger Ephraim over the older Manasseh.

Jacob's request to be buried in Canaan 47:28-31

Jacob lived 17 years in the care of Joseph who, ironically, had spent the first 17 years of his life in Jacob's care (37:2). As Jacob's death seemed to be approaching, he called for Joseph and made him swear to bury him in the Promised Land rather than in Egypt (cf. 24:2-3). As the father of such a person as Joseph, Jacob could have had a very fine burial. Notwithstanding his request demonstrated his preference for the promise of God rather than the acclaim of the world (cf. Moses, Heb. 11:24-25).

Placing the hand under the "thigh" was a ritual having connection with making a solemn promise (cf. 24:2-3).

Jacob worshipped God for granting his wish. He evidently prostrated himself on his bed in thanksgiving to Yahweh. He must have been too weak to bow down on the ground (cf. 48:12; 1 Kings 1:47).

"Jacob, in life too often the cunning schemer who trusted his own williness to achieve his ends, now in the face of death shows that his ultimate hope is the promise of God."¹⁰⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰⁴Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, and Strabo. See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:379, and *Cambridge Ancient History*, 1:306-310.

¹⁰⁰⁵See Frankfort, pp. 36-43.

¹⁰⁰⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 452.

Jacob's adoption of Joseph's sons 48:1-11

The events recorded in the last three chapters of Genesis deal with the last days of Jacob and Joseph. In these last chapters there are many other references to earlier episodes in the book.

"This constant harking back to earlier episodes and promises is totally in place in a book whose theme is the fulfillment of promises, a book that regularly uses analogy between episodes as a narrative technique. And at the close of a book it is particularly [*sic*] appropriate to exploit these cross-linkages to the full. It reinforces the sense of completeness and suggests that the story has reached a natural stopping point."¹⁰⁰⁷

This very important section explains how Ephraim and Manasseh came to have equal standing with Joseph's brothers and why Joseph did not become the head of a tribe.

Manasseh would have been between 20 and 26 years old at this time (41:50; 47:28). Ephraim, of course, was younger.

It was as Israel, the prince with God, that Jacob performed this official and significant act (vv. 2-4; cf. Heb. 11:21). His action was in harmony with God's will and purpose for the chosen family, and it involved the patriarchal promises to which he referred (cf. 35:10-12).

"Jacob may be losing his health, but he is not losing his memory. He can recall the incident of many years earlier when God appeared to him at Luz [Bethel] (35:9-15). He repeats the promises of God about fertility, multiplication, that his seed will be an assembly of nations, and finally the promise of land. The only essential element of that theophany he does not repeat is the name change from Jacob to Israel. In this way, Jacob minimizes his role and maximizes God's role in that event."¹⁰⁰⁸

By adopting Joseph's first two sons as his own and giving them equal standing with Joseph's brothers, Jacob was bestowing on Joseph the double portion of the birthright (v. 5; cf. v. 22; 1 Chron. 5:1-2). He was also in effect elevating Joseph to the level of himself. Joseph was the first son of Jacob's intended first wife. Jacob's reference to Rachel (v. 7) shows that she, as the mother of Joseph, was in his mind in this act. This act honored her. The other sons of Joseph received their own inheritances.

"Verse 7 has long puzzled biblical interpreters. Why the mention of Rachel at this point in the narrative, and why the mention of her burial site? If we relate the verse to what precedes, then the mention of Rachel here could be prompted by the fact that just as she had borne Jacob 'two sons' (44:27, Joseph and Benjamin) at a time when he was about to enter

¹⁰⁰⁷Ibid., p. 461.

¹⁰⁰⁸Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 628.

(48:7) the land, so also Joseph gave Jacob 'two sons' (v. 5) just at the time when he was about to enter Egypt."¹⁰⁰⁹

Jacob's eyes were failing in his old age (v. 10) so he may not have recognized Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. 27:1). However it seems more likely that by asking "Who are these?" (v. 8) Jacob was identifying the beneficiaries as part of the legal ritual of adoption and or blessing (cf. 27:18).

The eyesight of both Isaac and Jacob failed in their old age.

"There is a slight touch of irony here: Jacob had secured Isaac's blessing by guile and deceit, while Joseph is securing the blessing for his sons by honesty and forthrightness."¹⁰¹⁰

Jacob gave God the credit that he was able to see Joseph's sons (v. 11). He had come to acknowledge God's providential working and grace in his life as he realized how faithful God had been to him in spite of his unfaithfulness.

Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh 48:12-20

Ephraim and Manasseh had been standing close to Jacob, between his knees, so he could see and touch them (v. 12).¹⁰¹¹ Now Joseph took them back to where he had been standing in front of his father. He then bowed before Jacob.

"Joseph may be the second most powerful man in Egypt, but he never loses his respect for his father, and he never ceases to be gracious toward him."¹⁰¹²

Arranging Manasseh and Ephraim in the normal order for Jacob's blessing, by their age, Joseph then brought them forward again (v. 13).

This is the first of many scriptural instances of the laying on of hands (v. 14). By this symbolic act, a person transferred a spiritual power or gift to another. This rite was part of the ceremony of dedicating a person or group to an office (Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9; Matt. 19:13; Acts 6:6; 8:17; etc.), offering sacrifices, and the healings Jesus Christ and the apostles performed. In this case Jacob symbolically transferred a blessing from himself to Joseph's sons. Once uttered, blessings were irreversible (cf. Num. 23:20; Rom. 11:29).

¹⁰⁰⁹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 271.

¹⁰¹⁰Davis, p. 294.

¹⁰¹¹Ancient Near Eastern adoption ritual included placing the adopted child on the knees of the adopting parent to symbolize giving him birth in place of the birth mother. See I. Mendelsohn, "A Ugaritic Parallel to the Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh," *Israel Exploration Journal* (1959):180-83.

¹⁰¹²Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 635.

Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh also carried prophetic significance and force (vv. 19-20). Under the inspiration of God, Jacob deliberately gave Ephraim the privileged first-born blessing and predicted his preeminence.¹⁰¹³ We can see this blessing in the process of fulfillment during the judges period when Ephraim had grown very large and influential.¹⁰¹⁴ This tribe took the lead among the ten northern tribes and flourished to the extent that the Jews used the name Ephraim equally with the name Israel. The Ephraimites occasionally demonstrated an attitude of superiority among the tribes that we can trace back to this blessing (e.g., Judg. 12:1; et al.).

The reference to Israel in verse 20 applies to the nation in the future from Jacob's viewpoint.

Jacob's announcement of Joseph's birthright 48:21-22

Jacob (Israel, the prince with God because of his faith) firmly believed God's promise to bring his descendants back into the Promised Land (cf. 46:4). Jacob's prophetic promise to Joseph (v. 22) is a play on words. The word for "portion" means ridge or shoulder (of land) and is the same as "Shechem." Shechem lay in Manasseh's territory. The Israelites later buried Joseph at Shechem (Josh. 24:32). Jacob regarded the land that he had purchased there (33:18-20) as a pledge of his descendants' future possession of the whole land. In Jesus' day people spoke of Shechem (near Sychar) as what Jacob had given to Joseph (John 4:5).

Jacob spoke as though he had taken Shechem from the Amorites by force (v. 22). Probably Jacob viewed Simeon and Levi's slaughter of the Shechemites as his own taking of the city (34:27-29).¹⁰¹⁵ Another view is that Moses used the perfect tense in Hebrew, translated past tense in English ("took"), prophetically. In this usage, which is common in the Old Testament, the writer spoke of the future as past. The idea was that since God predicted them by divine inspiration events yet future are so certain of fulfillment that one could speak of them as already past. Here the thought is that Israel (Jacob) would take Canaan from the Amorites, the most powerful of the Canaanite tribes, not personally, but in his posterity (cf. 15:16).¹⁰¹⁶

Other scholars have suggested another explanation.

"It is not impossible that the property which Jacob owned at Shechem was taken away by the Amorites after he left the region (cf. 35:4, 5) and that he eventually returned and repossessed it by force of arms?"¹⁰¹⁷

¹⁰¹³This was the fourth consecutive generation of Abraham's descendants in which the normal pattern of the firstborn assuming prominence over the second born was reversed: Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, and Ephraim over Manasseh.

¹⁰¹⁴The combined tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh increased from 72,700 in the second year after the Exodus (Num. 1:32-35) to 85,200 40 years later (Num. 26:28-37). By contrast the tribes of Reuben and Simeon decreased from 105,800 to 65,930 during the same period.

¹⁰¹⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 601.

¹⁰¹⁶Keil and Delitzsch, 1:385.

¹⁰¹⁷Davis, p. 294. Cf. H. Vos, p. 165; Aalders, 2:267; Leupold, 2:1158; Bush, 2:384; Thomas, p. 464.

Apparently Jacob gave Joseph Shechem, which he regarded as a down-payment of all that God would give his descendants as they battled the Canaanites in the future.

"For Joseph it was an honour that his father entrusted him with his funeral in Palestine (47.30f.). In 48.21f., the implication in family law is finally drawn: Joseph, instead of Reuben, receives the double heritage as a sign of his primogeniture (48.22a). Just as the son is commanded to bury the father in Palestine, so it is in Palestine that the priority of Joseph within the family takes effect. These two scenes thus enclose a detailed blessing for Joseph and his sons, so filling out the promise of his superiority in Palestine (48.22a)."¹⁰¹⁸

Believers whom God has shepherded for a lifetime can see God's purposes and plans for the future more clearly even though the maturing process has been difficult for them.¹⁰¹⁹

14. Jacob's blessing of his sons 49:1-28

Having blessed Pharaoh (47:7-10) and Ephraim and Manasseh (48:15-20), Jacob next blessed all 12 of his sons and foretold what would become of each of them and their descendants. He disqualified Reuben, Simeon, and Levi from leadership and gave that blessing to Judah. He granted the double portion to Joseph. This chapter is the last one in Genesis that gives the destinies of the family members of Abraham's chosen line. It contains blessings, curses, judgments, and promises, all of which are prominent in Genesis.

"These chapters, then, take the story from the first mention of Abram in 11:26 to the first mention of Israel as a people, a people blessed by God with a special blessing."¹⁰²⁰

The writer of Genesis called this section Jacob's blessing (v. 28). Isaac had prophetically outlined the future of his two sons' families (ch. 27). Earlier Noah had prophesied the future of Canaan's descendants (9:25-27). Likewise Jacob by divine inspiration foretold major characteristics of each of the twelve tribes that would issue from his twelve sons (v. 1). Each blessing contains at least one of these elements: 1) a synopsis of the son's personality, 2) a hint as to his potential, and 3) a prophecy of his future.

"Jacob predicted how things would turn out for each of his sons and their descendants, should they continue to display the character they had displayed thus far."¹⁰²¹

¹⁰¹⁸Horst Seebass, "The Joseph Story, Genesis 48 and the Canonical Process," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (June 1986):30.

¹⁰¹⁹See William J. McIlwain Jr., "My Ways Are Not Your Ways," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):92-100.

¹⁰²⁰Whybray, p. 4.

¹⁰²¹Joel D. Heck, "A History of Interpretation of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:585 (January-March 1990):20. See also Stigers, p. 325.

This is the first long poem in the Bible.

"This chapter, in that it is poetry, seems to be intended to be a high point of the *toledot ya'aqob* (i.e., chaps. 37—50), if not the whole book of Genesis."¹⁰²²

This blessing rested on God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Each son learned how his branch of the family would benefit from and be a channel of blessing relative to the patriarchal promises. The natural character of each son and the consequences of that character would have their outcome in the future of the Israelites. The choices and consequently the characters of the patriarchs affected their descendants for generations to come.

"The Spirit of God revealed to the dying patriarch Israel the future history of his seed, so that he discovered in the character of his sons the future development of the tribes proceeding from them, and with prophetic clearness assigned to each of them its position and importance in the nation into which they were to expand in the promised inheritance."¹⁰²³

"It is fitting that the Book of Genesis, which opened with the creative power of the divine word, closes with the notion of the effective power of the inspired predictive word of the patriarch."¹⁰²⁴

Jacob assumed in his blessing that his family would increase and possess the land of Canaan. This optimism reveals his faith.

"God gave His people this prophecy to bear them through the dismal barrenness of their experiences and to show them that He planned all the future. For Jacob's family, the future lay beyond the bondage of Egypt in the land of promise. But the enjoyment of the blessings of that hope would depend on the participants' faithfulness. So from the solemnity of his deathbed Jacob evaluated his sons one by one, and carried his evaluation forward to the future tribes."¹⁰²⁵

The scope of his prophecy extends into the millennial age. God did not fulfill these prophecies completely during the lifetime of Jacob's sons. He did not do so during Israel's years in the land beginning with the conquest of Joshua and ending with the captivities. Moreover He has not done so since then.

"Jacob's last words to his sons have become the occasion for a final statement of the book's major theme: God's plan to restore the lost blessing [lost in the Fall] through the offspring of Abraham.

¹⁰²²R. E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence*, p. 23.

¹⁰²³Keil and Delitzsch, 1:387.

¹⁰²⁴Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 331.

¹⁰²⁵Ross, "Genesis," p. 98.

"By framing Jacob's last words between v. 1 and v. 28, the writer shows where his interests lie. Jacob's words look to the future—'in days to come'—and draw on the past, viz., God's blessing of mankind. It is within that context we are to read and understand Jacob's words in this chapter."¹⁰²⁶

49:1-4 **Reuben.** As the first-born, Reuben could have anticipated preeminence among his brothers, leadership of the tribes, priesthood within the family, and the double portion of the birthright. However, he forfeited these blessings preferring rather to give free reign to his lust (35:22; cf. Esau). The leadership of the tribes therefore went to Judah, the priesthood to Levi eventually (cf. Exod. 32:25-29; Num. 3:12-13), and the double portion to Joseph. Joseph was the first-born of the favored Rachel whereas Reuben was Leah's first-born. Joseph's priority was not due solely to Jacob's preference, however, but to the will of God as revealed in Joseph's dreams.

"About no other tribe do we know so little as about *Reuben*. . . . The tribe produced no significant man, no judge, no king, no prophet."¹⁰²⁷

Irresolution marked the Reubenites in the time of Israel's judges (Judg. 5:15-16).

"This forfeiture is fulfilled historically in later times when the Reubenites living in Transjordan are integrated into the tribe of Gad.

"From this first oracle the teaching is clear that the behavior of one individual affects the destiny of his descendants."¹⁰²⁸

49:5-7 **Simeon and Levi.** These two were brothers not only by blood but also in disposition. They were violent, wicked men (34:25-31). Because of their wickedness they would have no independent tribal territory, but their descendants would live scattered among the other tribes. By the second census, just before the Israelites entered Canaan, the Simeonites had become the weakest tribe (Num. 26:14). Moses passed over the Simeonites in his blessing of the Israelites (Deut. 33). This tribe received only a few cities within the allotment of Judah rather than a separate geographical territory (Josh. 19:1-9). The Simeonites eventually lost their tribal identity among the other tribes, especially Judah (cf. 1 Chron. 4:27, 38-43).

¹⁰²⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 274, 275.

¹⁰²⁷von Rad, p. 423. No priest came from Reuben either.

¹⁰²⁸Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 647.

The Levites also received no large land grant, but Joshua gave them several cities in which they lived among the other tribes (Josh. 21:1-42). The Levites gained a special blessing at Mt. Sinai by siding with Moses when the other Israelites apostatized (Exod. 32:26-28; Num. 3:5-13; 18:6-32).

Even though these first three tribes suffered punishment for their sins, Jacob's prophecies about them were still a blessing. They retained a place in the chosen family and enjoyed the benefits of the patriarchal promises as Jacob's heirs.

"By demoting Reuben for his turbulence and uncontrolled sex drive, Jacob saves Israel from reckless leadership. Likewise, by cursing the cruelty of Simeon and Levi, he restricts their cruel rashness from dominating."¹⁰²⁹

49:8-12 **Judah.** Judah possessed a lion-like nature. As such he became the leader of the other tribes (43:3-10; Judg. 1:1-2; 3:9; 20:18; etc.). Through him came David and Messiah, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Judah led the other tribes in the march through the wilderness (Num. 2:1-3) and in the monarchy.

The scepter (v. 10) was and is the symbol of royal command, the right to rule. Judah was to exercise leadership among the tribes until Shiloh came at which time Shiloh would extend Judah's rule to worldwide dominion. Judah's leadership was not consistently preeminent in the history of Israel, however.

Shiloh (lit. the "bearer of rest") is a proper name. It refers here not to the city in Canaan of that name but to a person who would arise in the tribe of Judah and bring peace to the world, namely, Messiah (cf. 3:15; Num. 24:17). We should probably translate it "whose it (the ruler's staff) is" or "to whom it belongs" rather than transliterate it "Shiloh" (cf. Ezek. 21:26-27).¹⁰³⁰ Another live option is "until tribute is brought to him."¹⁰³¹

"Whichever of these interpretations is adopted, . . . all at least agree that this line is predicting the rise of the Davidic monarchy and the establishment of the Israelite empire, if not the coming of a greater David. And if the primary reference is to David, traditional Jewish and Christian exegetes would agree that like other Davidic promises it has a greater fulfillment in the Messiah."¹⁰³²

¹⁰²⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 603.

¹⁰³⁰See Eugene H. Merrill, "Rashi, Nicholas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1975):74-75.

¹⁰³¹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 478.

¹⁰³²Ibid.

Because Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had disqualified themselves Judah received the leadership of the tribes and the blessing that normally went to the first-born. This is how the leadership of the tribes and the Messianic line fell to Judah. Jacob forgave Judah's earlier sins because he repented and later sacrificed himself for Jacob's wellbeing.

Everything after "Until" (v. 10) describes millennial conditions.

"No Judean would tie his ass to a vine [v. 11], for it would be eaten up, of course. Anyone who can be so careless and who can wash his garments in wine, lives in paradisiacal abundance."¹⁰³³

"The sense of the imagery is that wine, the symbol of prosperity and blessing, will be so plentiful that even the choicest vines will be put to such everyday use as tethering the animals of burden and vintage wine will be as commonplace as wash water. Verse 12 returns to the picture of the king of Judah. His eyes are darker than wine and his teeth whiter than milk. He is a picture of strength and power."¹⁰³⁴

This prophecy is the first of many that associate bumper crops with the golden age of future blessing that follow in the Old Testament.

49:13-21 These verses contain Jacob's shorter blessings on the other sons except Joseph and Benjamin whose blessings follow these.

"True to the poetic qualities of the text, the images of the destiny of the remaining sons are, in most cases, based on a wordplay of the son's name. The central theme uniting each image is that of prosperity."¹⁰³⁵

Zebulun (v. 13) later obtained territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. This was a thriving commercial area though Zebulun may never have had permanent "waterfront property." It is possible, however, that Zebulun and Issachar shared some territory (cf. Deut. 33:18-19), so Zebulun could have bordered the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps the men of Zebulun worked for the Phoenicians in their maritime trade (cf. Deut. 33:19). Zebulun will extend to the sea in the Millennium when his borders will extend as far as Sidon on the Mediterranean (cf. Ezek. 48:1-8, 23-27). An important caravan route from Mesopotamia to Egypt passed through his territory.

¹⁰³³von Rad, p. 425.

¹⁰³⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 277.

¹⁰³⁵Ibid.

Issachar (vv. 14-15) would prefer an agricultural way of life and what it produced rather than political supremacy among the tribes. Lower Galilee including the valley of Jezreel, which Issachar obtained, was a pleasant and productive farming area.¹⁰³⁶

Dan (vv. 16-18) would be a judge in Israel. This prophecy came to reality partially during Samson's judgeship. Dan's victories benefited all Israel. Yet this tribe led Israel into idolatry (Judg. 18) and was therefore similar to a serpent (v. 17). Jacob asked Yahweh to deliver his descendants in the future (v. 18).

"Jacob's heartfelt aside in 18 is enigmatic: it could arise from a father's prayer, like Abraham's for Ishmael (17:18), or possibly from the sudden memory of his own treachery, long renounced, called up by the acts and the words (heel[s], 17, 19) associated with his own name."¹⁰³⁷

Gad (v. 19) would also be effective in battle.

Asher (v. 20) would enjoy very fruitful soil, namely, the lowlands of the Carmel (lit. vineyard) range north along the Mediterranean coast. This area contained some of the most fertile land in Canaan.

Naphtali (v. 21) evidently would enjoy the admiration and appreciation of the other tribes in a special way (cf. Judg. 4 and 5). Jacob could have meant that Naphtali would exchange his freedom for a more sedentary domesticated lifestyle in the land, or that he would accommodate to the Canaanites.¹⁰³⁸

49:22-26

Joseph's blessing was especially abundant. The two tribes that bore his sons' names would see its fulfillment even though during his lifetime Joseph had faced much opposition. Judah received the leadership of the tribes, but Joseph obtained the double portion of the birthright (cf. 1 Chron. 5:2).

Jacob's names for God in this blessing are noteworthy: "the Mighty One of Jacob" (cf. Isa. 1:24; et al.), "the Shepherd" (48:15), and "the Stone of Israel" (cf. Deut. 32:4, 18, et al.).

"Blessing is one of the key words of Genesis . . . occurring some eighty-eight times in the book. Here in two verses [25 and 26], like the finale of a fireworks display, the root occurs six times (verb 1x, noun 5x) making a brilliant

¹⁰³⁶See Joel D. Heck, "Issachar: Slave or Freeman? [Gen. 49:14-15]," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29:4 (December 1986):385-96.

¹⁰³⁷Kidner, p. 220.

¹⁰³⁸Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 483.

climax to the last words of Jacob. The God-given blessings of the future will far outshine those already experienced."¹⁰³⁹

- 49:27 **Benjamin** produced many warriors in Israel's history (e.g., Ehud, Saul, Jonathan, et al.) and demonstrated a warlike character among the tribes (Judg. 5:14; 20:16; 1 Chron. 8:40; ch. 12; 2 Chron. 14:8; 17:17; et al.).
- 49:28 In his twelve sons Jacob blessed all the future tribes of Israel.¹⁰⁴⁰ This is only the second mention of the 12 tribes in the Bible (cf. v. 16).

"Within Jacob's words to each of the sons (after Judah), the theme of blessing has been evident in two primary images. First, the reverse side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of the victorious warrior. The defeat of the enemy is the prelude to the messianic peace. Second, the positive side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of great prosperity and abundance. Behind such imagery of peace and prosperity lies the picture of the Garden of Eden—the Paradise lost. The focus of Jacob's words has been the promise that when the one comes to whom the kingship truly belongs, there will once again be the peace and prosperity that God intended all to have in the Garden of Eden."¹⁰⁴¹

Sailhamer also proposed that this poetic section plays a significant role in the larger structure of the Pentateuch.

"At three macrostructural junctures in the Pentateuch, the author has spliced a major poetic discourse onto the end of a large unit of narrative (Ge 49; Nu 24; Dt 31). A close look at the material lying between and connecting the narrative and poetic sections reveals the presence of a homogeneous composition stratum. It is most noticeably marked by the recurrence of the same terminology and narrative motifs. In each of the three segments, the central narrative figure (Jacob, Balaam, Moses) calls an audience together (imperative: Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:28) and proclaims (cohortative: Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:28) what will happen (Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29) in 'the end of days' (Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29). . . .

In sum, the apparent overall strategy of the author in these three segments suggests that one of the central concerns lying behind the final shape of the Pentateuch is an attempt to uncover an inherent relationship between the past and the future. That which happened to God's people in the past portends of future events. To say it another way, the past is seen as a lesson for the future. . . .

¹⁰³⁹Ibid., p. 486.

¹⁰⁴⁰See Darby, 1:80-82, for further observations concerning the fulfillment of these prophecies.

¹⁰⁴¹Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 278-79.

"The narrative texts of past events are presented as pointers to future events. Past events foreshadow the future. It is not hard to see that such a hermeneutic leads to a form of narrative typology. We should, then, look for signs of such a typology in the composition of the smaller units of narrative in the Pentateuch as well as in the arrangement of the legal material."¹⁰⁴²

A believer's works during this life significantly determine the extent of divine blessing he and his descendants will receive in the future.

15. Deaths and a promise yet to be fulfilled 49:29—50:26

Joseph received permission from Pharaoh to bury Jacob in Canaan as he had requested. He then assured his brothers of his favor in spite of how they had treated him and testified that God would fulfill His promises.

Plans to bury Jacob in Canaan 49:29—50:14

Jacob again expressed his faith in God's promises that Canaan would be the Israelites' homeland by requesting burial in the Cave of Machpelah near Hebron (cf. 47:29-32; 48:21-22).

"This scene concludes Jacob's finest hour. On his deathbed—a scene extending from 47:28 to 49:32—Jacob has assumed total and dynamic leadership of the family. Even Joseph bows down to him."¹⁰⁴³

He died peacefully and was "gathered to his people" (i.e., reunited with his ancestors, implying life after death, in the place of departed spirits). Jacob was 147 when he died (47:28).

Joseph evidently had Jacob's body preserved as a mummy (50:2).¹⁰⁴⁴

Jacob's elaborate funeral was probably due both to the high regard in which the Egyptians held him as Joseph's father and to the Egyptians' love of showy funeral ceremonies (vv. 7-10).¹⁰⁴⁵ It is the grandest state funeral recorded in the Bible, appropriate since Jacob's story spans more than half of Genesis. The Egyptians mourned for Jacob just two days less than they normally mourned the death of a Pharaoh.¹⁰⁴⁶

"This grand funeral procession and this exaltation of Jacob as a king by the Egyptians foreshadows Israel's exodus from the world and gives a foretaste of the time when the nations hail a son of Jacob as King."¹⁰⁴⁷

¹⁰⁴²Idem, *The Pentateuch . . .*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁰⁴³Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 617.

¹⁰⁴⁴See Davis, *Paradise to . . .*, pp. 302-3, or H. Vos, p. 169, for how the Egyptians prepared mummies.

¹⁰⁴⁵See E. W. Hengstenberg, *Egypt and the Books of Moses*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁰⁴⁶Ross, "Genesis," p. 100.

¹⁰⁴⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 618.

The record of Jacob's burial in the land is important to the purpose of Genesis. God had promised the land to Abraham and had given the patriarchs small portions of it. The faith of these men that God would fulfill His promises and do for their descendants all that He had promised is obvious in their view of Canaan as their homeland. They counted on the future faithfulness of God who had proved Himself faithful to them personally during their lifetimes.

Peace in the family of Jacob 50:15-21

The words of Joseph's brothers were probably not true (vv. 16-17). Jacob may have left such a message even though Moses did not record it in Genesis. Since Moses did not record it, he probably intended the reader to conclude that Jacob had not. The brothers feared because of their uneasy consciences rather than Joseph's behavior (cf. v. 19).

Joseph's response to his fearful brothers reveals his attitudes toward God and them (vv. 18-21). He humbled himself under God's authority. He regarded God as sovereign over him and the One who had providentially guided all the events of his life. He knew that God's purposes for him, his family, and all people were good (cf. chs. 1—2). Consequently he behaved with tender compassion toward his brothers. He proved to be his brothers' keeper (cf. 4:9). Genesis opened with a couple, Adam and Eve, trying to become like God. It closes with a man, Joseph, denying that he is in God's place.¹⁰⁴⁸ Judas was to Jesus what Joseph's brothers were to Joseph.¹⁰⁴⁹

"The sequence of deceptions that causes this family so much suffering finally comes to an end when Joseph chooses not to take revenge on his brothers."¹⁰⁵⁰

"Each sentence of his threefold reply is a pinnacle of Old Testament (and New Testament) faith. To leave all the righting of one's wrongs to God (19; cf. Rom. 12:19; 1 Thes. 5:15; 1 Pet. 4:19); to see His providence in man's malice (20; cf. on 45:5); and to repay evil not only with forgiveness but also with practical affection (21; cf. Luke 6:27ff.), are attitudes which anticipate the adjective 'Christian' and even 'Christlike.'"¹⁰⁵¹

"Behind all the events and human plans recounted in the story of Joseph lies the unchanging plan of God. It is the same plan introduced from the very beginning of the book where God looks out at what he has just created for man and sees that 'it is good' (*tob*, 1:4-31). Through his dealings with the patriarchs and Joseph, God had continued to bring about his good plan. He had remained faithful to his purposes, and it is the point of this narrative to show that his people can continue to trust him and to

¹⁰⁴⁸E. I. Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis*, p. 156.

¹⁰⁴⁹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 707.

¹⁰⁵⁰Richard Elliott Friedman, "Deception for Deception," *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1986):30.

¹⁰⁵¹Kidner, p. 224.

believe that 'in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose' (Rom 8:28)."¹⁰⁵²

The death of Joseph 50:22-26

Joseph lived to see God's blessing on his children's children. He died 54 years after Jacob's death when he was 110 years old.¹⁰⁵³ Many Egyptian texts refer to 110 as the ideal lifespan.¹⁰⁵⁴

Joseph probably could have experienced burial in a pyramid or had some other grand burial in Egypt. However, he wanted his family to embalm him and place his body in a coffin in Egypt. Later descendants could bury him in the Promised Land near Shechem. They did so in the parcel of land his father had bought and given to him, perhaps under Abraham's oak (48:22; cf. Josh. 24:32). This expression of Joseph's faith in God's promises to his forefathers provides a fitting climax for the Book of Genesis and the formative period of Israel's history.¹⁰⁵⁵

"The outstanding feature of Joseph's life was faithful loyalty to God under all circumstances."¹⁰⁵⁶

"The story of Joseph illustrates patient faith and its reward. It ends the book of Genesis and brings its theme to a literary climax. . . . But the story of Joseph shows us that the road to victory, dominion, mastery, and judicial authority, is through service, the humble service of a slave. Through service and suffering, God purges and destroys indwelling sin in the believer (not completely, but sufficiently), builds character in him, and fits him for the mastery of the world."¹⁰⁵⁷

"The Book of Genesis, like the Old Testament in microcosm, ends by pointing beyond its own story Joseph's dying words epitomized the hope in which the Old Testament, and indeed the New (cf. Rev. 22:20), would fall into expectant silence: *God will surely visit you.*"¹⁰⁵⁸

Believers who trust that the Lord will fulfill His promises to bless in His own inscrutable ways will demonstrate their faith in the way they die.

¹⁰⁵²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 283.

¹⁰⁵³See Hugh C. White, "The Joseph Story: A Narrative that 'Consumes' Its Content," *Semeia* 31 (1985):49-69.

¹⁰⁵⁴Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 709.

¹⁰⁵⁵Verse 24 contains the first reference to the three patriarchs together.

¹⁰⁵⁶Thomas, p. 379.

¹⁰⁵⁷Jordan, pp. 67-68.

¹⁰⁵⁸Kidner, p. 224.

Conclusion

From the many great revelations of God in Genesis probably the most outstanding attributes are His power and faithfulness. Almost every section of the book demonstrates the fact that God is absolutely trustworthy. People can rely on His word with confidence. All the major characters in Genesis came to acknowledge the faithfulness of God. Even Jacob, who was perhaps the most skeptical, came to a firm trust in God as God guided him through his life experiences.

The major revelation about man in Genesis is his creation in the image of God. As the bearer of God's image he has a relationship with his Creator as well as with his fellow creatures. The image of God in man consists of his spiritual qualities that distinguish him from other created beings. The Fall distorted but did not obliterate this image. It also damaged but did not destroy man's relationship with God.

The key revelation in Genesis concerning the relationship that God and people have is that God initiated it and they can enjoy it when they respond in trust and obedience. People can and must have faith in God to enjoy the relationship with God that God created us to experience. As men and women trust God, they experience God's blessing and become instruments through whom God works to bring blessing to others.

Appendix

FIVE VIEWS OF CREATION¹⁰⁵⁹

Atheistic Evolution

Statement of the view

Everything in the universe has come into existence and has evolved into its present form as a result of natural processes unaided by any supernatural power.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It appears to explain the origin of everything.
2. It offers a single explanation for everything that exists: it evolved.
3. It offers the only real alternative to creation by God.
4. It eliminates God and exalts man.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. It cannot explain the origin of matter. Answer: Matter is eternal.
2. It cannot explain the complexity of matter. Answer: Billions of years of evolution are responsible for the complexity of matter.
3. It cannot explain the emergence of life. Answer: Primordial life evolved from bio-polymers that evolved from inorganic compounds.
4. It cannot explain the appearance of God-consciousness in man. Answer: This too was the product of evolution.

Evaluation of the view

1. It rests on a hypothesis that cannot be proven to be true; it is essentially a faith position.
2. Its support rests on little historical evidence (only the fossil record) which has many gaps in it and is open to different interpretations.
3. It relies on mutations as a mechanism for change. However mutations have not produced new species.
4. It is extremely improbable statistically.
5. It repudiates special revelation concerning creation.

Modern advocates of the view

Almost all non-Christian scientists and many Christian scientists hold this view.

¹⁰⁵⁹This material is a condensation of James M. Boice, *Genesis*, 1:37-68, with additions by myself.

Theistic Evolution

Statement of the view

Everything in the universe has come into existence and has evolved into its present form as a result of natural processes guided by the God of the Bible.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It unites truth known by special revelation with truth known by general revelation in nature and truth discovered by science.
2. God seems to work according to this pattern in history interrupting and intervening in the course of events only rarely.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. It presupposes the truth of evolution, which scientists have not been able to validate beyond doubt. Answer: Evolution is a fact or at least an accepted theory.
2. God has intervened in history many more times than the theistic evolutionist posits. Answer: In the early history of the universe He intervened less frequently.
3. Divine intervention in the evolutionary process is contradictory to the basic theory of evolutionary progress. Answer: The evolutionary process does not rule out divine intervention.
4. This method of creation does not do justice to the biblical record of creation. Answer: We should interpret the biblical record nonliterally when it conflicts with evolution.

Evaluation of the view

1. It cannot do justice to both the tenets of evolution and the teaching of Scripture.
2. It is ultimately destructive of biblical religion.

Modern advocates of the view

Some scientists and theologians who have respect for but a weak view of Scripture hold this view, for example, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959).

Progressive Creation

Statement of the view

God created the world directly and deliberately, without leaving anything to chance, but He did it over long periods of time that correspond roughly to the geological ages.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It provides a reasonable harmony between the Genesis record and the facts of science.
2. The translation of "day" as "age" is an exegetically legitimate one.
3. It is a tentative conclusion and acknowledges that not all the scientific evidence is in and our understanding of the text may change as biblical scholarship progresses.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. There are discrepancies between the fossil record and the order in which Genesis records that God created plants, fish, and animals. Answer: Science may be wrong at this point, or Genesis may have omitted the earliest forms of life.
2. Taking the six days of creation as ages is unusual exegetically. Answer: This interpretation is possible and best here.
3. "Evenings" and "mornings" suggest 24-hour periods. Answer: The sun did not appear until the fourth day.
4. Death entered the world before the Fall. Answer: It took on its horror at the Fall but existed before that event.

Evaluation of the view

This view takes the biblical text quite seriously but adopts some unusual interpretations of that text to harmonize it with scientific data.

Modern advocates of the view

Many evangelicals who have been strongly influenced by science hold this view including Davis A. Young, *Creation and the Flood* (1977). James Boice, Bernard Ramm, Robert Newman, Herman Eckelmann, and Hugh Ross also hold this view.

Six-Day Creationism

Statement of the view

Genesis 1 describes one creative process that took place in six consecutive 24-hour periods of time not more than 6,000 to 15,000 years ago.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It regards biblical teaching as determinative.
2. It rests on a strong exegetical base.
3. It is the most literal (normal) meaning of the text.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. Data from various scientific disciplines (i.e., astronomy, radioactive dating, carbon deposits, etc.) indicate that the earth is about 5 billion years old and the universe is about 15-20 billion years old. Answer: God created the cosmos with the appearance of age.¹⁰⁶⁰
2. A universal flood cannot explain the geologic strata fully. Answer: It can explain most if not all of it, and the remainder may have been a result of creation.
3. Creation with the appearance of age casts doubt on the credibility of God. Answer: Since God evidently created Adam, plants, and animals with the appearance of age He may have created other things with the appearance of age too.
4. There is no reason why God would have created things with the appearance of age. Answer: He did so for His own glory, though we may not fully understand why yet.

Evaluation of the view

This view rests on the best exegesis of the text, though it contradicts the conclusions of several branches of science.

Modern advocates of the view

Many conservative evangelicals hold this view. See also Robert E. Kofahl and Kelly L. Seagraves, *The Creation Explanation* (1975).

The Gap Theory

Statement of the view

Between Genesis 1:1 and 2 there was a long, indeterminate period in which we can locate the destruction of an original world and the unfolding of the geological ages.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It rests on an exegetical, biblical base.
2. It is consistent with the structure of the creation account itself.
3. It is possible to translate the Hebrew verb translated "to be" in verse 2 "become."
4. "Formless and void" in verse 2 may be a clue to God's pre-Adamic judgment on the earth.
5. It provides a setting for the fall of Satan.

¹⁰⁶⁰For a critique of the carbon-14 dating method, see Ham, et al., pp. 12, 65-75; George Howe, "Carbon-14 and Other Radioactive Dating Methods;" or Glenn R. Morton, "The Carbon Problem," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 20:4 (March 1984):212-19.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. It is an unnatural explanation since the text implies only an original creation in Genesis 1:2 and following (cf. Exod. 20:11). Answer: This interpretation is a superficial conclusion.
2. The exegetical data that supports this view is far from certain. Answer: These interpretations are possible.
3. This theory does not really settle the problems posed by geology. Answer: The universal flood may have produced some of the geological phenomena.

Evaluation of the view

While this view grows out of a high view of Scripture, several of the interpretations required for it rely on improbable exegesis.

Modern advocates of the view

Many conservative evangelicals including Arthur Pink, C. I. Scofield, C. S. Lewis, M. R. DeHaan, and D. G. Barnhouse held this view. See also Arthur C. Custance, *Without Form and Void* (1970).

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