

Notes on Genesis

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Introduction

TITLE

Each book of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament, called "The Pentateuch" since about A.D. 160, called "The Torah" [instruction] by the Jews), originally received its title in the Hebrew Bible from the first word or words in the book. There 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.

The Hebrew word translated "in the beginning" is transliterated *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).¹

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.

Many evangelicals 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 these

¹Cf. Jason S. Derouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, The Promised Offspring, and The Toledot Structure of Genesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:2 (June 2013):219-47.

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

Many interpreters have placed the date of composition of Genesis much later than Moses' lifetime. Some of them do this because Genesis contains some names that became common designations of people and places after Moses' time (e.g., the Philistines, Dan, et al.). I shall discuss these anomalies as we come to them. See also the section below: "Writer." 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.² Moses may have written it earlier to prepare them for the Exodus,³ but this seems less likely.

WRITER

The authorship of the Pentateuch (Gr. *penta*, "five," and *teuchos*, "a case for carrying papyrus rolls" and, in later usage, the "scrolls" themselves), 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 (Jehovistic) tradition (supposedly dating from the ninth century B.C.), an Elohist tradition (eighth century B.C.), a Deuteronomic tradition (seventh century B.C.), a Priestly tradition (fifth century B.C.), etc. The subject of Old Testament Introduction deals with these matters.⁴ One writer summed up the present state of this controversy as follows.

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

The evidence that Moses wrote the Pentateuch seems 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). The New Testament writers quoted or alluded to Genesis over 60 times in 17 books. Jesus Christ did not

²Eugene 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.

³E.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.

⁴See especially Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 42-51.

⁵Kitchen, p. 78.

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.⁶ 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

"Just west of Abydos in southern Egypt, the Wadi el-Hol site yielded an alphabetic inscription carved on the underface of a ledge. Palaeographically it resembled a text found at Serabit al-Khadem in the Sinai Peninsula from 1600 B.C., which until 1993 was the earliest alphabet ever found. But the Wadi Hol example is at least two hundred years older, dating from the time Jacob and his sons lived in Egypt. The argument that Moses could not have written the Torah in alphabetic form that early (ca. 1400 B.C.) thus has no basis."⁸

How did Moses receive this information? He may have done so in either of two ways. Perhaps Adam and Eve told the creation story to their descendants, and they passed it on to succeeding generations orally or in written form (i.e., tradition). Moses' mother may have told him these stories as a child. If so, God guarded the true account. The other ancient Near Eastern accounts were perversions of what really happened. Another possibility is that God revealed the creation account directly to Moses.

SCOPE

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

The scope of the book progressively and consistently narrows. 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.⁹

⁶See, for example, the testimony of Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish-Christian writer, to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, in *Against Apion*, 1:8.

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 many liberal scholars have ignored it. More recently, Kenneth Kitchen's series of six articles, "The Old Testament in its Context" in *Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin* (1971-72), especially the sixth article, refuted "the fashionable myth" (p. 9) of the evolution of Israel's religion as proposed by Julius Wellhausen and his followers. Another excellent rebuttal by a Jewish scholar, Umberto Cassuto, is his *The Documentary Hypothesis*. For a review of other subsequent approaches scholars have pursued in the study of Genesis (i.e., the form-critical, tradition-historical, and rhetorical-critical), see Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, pp. 27-35; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1—17*, pp. 11-38; or Wolf, pp. 71-78.

⁸Eugene Merrill, "The Veracity of the Word: A Summary of Major Archaeological Finds," *Kindred Spirit* 34:3 (Winter 2010):13.

⁹See the chart "Chronology of Genesis," in John Davis, *From Paradise to Prison*, p. 29.

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."¹⁰

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.¹¹ 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."¹²

The practical purpose of Genesis is to encourage the reader to trust and obey God. Originally, the purpose was to encourage the Israelites to trust and obey God. Moses may have composed Genesis before the Israelites left Egypt in the Exodus, but he probably did so during the wilderness wanderings. In any case, this was his obvious purpose, as is clear from what he wrote. He wanted to prepare the Israelites for the future by reminding them of the past. This is its function for us today too. As we read the text, we should continually ask ourselves, "What did this mean to the original readers?" That is what God intended it to mean to us today.

Moses' main point was that the same God who created Israel had created the universe. His word was the key instrument in creating both entities. As He had brought order, fullness, and rest to the *material world*, so He could do for His *chosen people*. He is the sovereign of the universe, its ultimate authority. Therefore mankind should trust and obey Him.

¹⁰Moses H. Segal, *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Its Authorship and Other Biblical Studies*, p. 23.

¹¹Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 13.

¹²Ross, "Genesis," p. 21.

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.

"What gives the Old Testament its force and unity is the affirmation of the sovereignty of God. God is the basis of all things and all that exists only exists by his will."¹³

"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)."¹⁴

STRUCTURE

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.¹⁵ The Jews regarded "ten" as the symbolical number of completeness.¹⁶

"The person named is not necessarily the main character but is the beginning point of the section that also closes with his death."¹⁷

¹³Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 37.

¹⁴Ross, "Genesis," p. 26. For further discussion of the theology of the Pentateuch, see Wolf, pp. 23-40.

¹⁵For 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.

¹⁶Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 137.

¹⁷Longman and Dillard, p. 53.

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

Moses' movement was from the general to the specific throughout the book.

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

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

Total: at least 2,300 years

OUTLINE

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

- I. 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 Abram's obedience 11:27—12:9
 - 2. Abram in Egypt 12:10-20
 - 3. Abram's separation from Lot ch. 13
 - 4. Abram's military victory ch. 14
 - 5. The Abrahamic covenant ch. 15
 - 6. The birth of Ishmael ch. 16
 - 7. The sign of circumcision ch. 17
 - 8. Yahweh's visit to Abraham 18:1-15
 - 9. Abraham's intercession for Lot 18:16-33
 - 10. The destruction of Sodom ch. 19
 - 11. Abraham's sojourn at Gerar ch. 20
 - 12. The birth of Isaac 21:1-21
 - 13. Abimelech's treaty with Abraham 21:22-34
 - 14. The sacrifice of Isaac 22:1-19
 - 15. The descendants of Nahor 22:20-24
 - 16. The purchase of Sarah's tomb ch. 23
 - 17. The choice of a bride for Isaac ch. 24
 - 18. Abraham's death 25:1-11
 - B. What became of Ishmael 25:12-18
 - C. What became of Isaac 25:19—35:29
 - 1. Isaac's twin sons 25:19-26
 - 2. The sale of the birthright 25:27-34
 - 3. Isaac and Abimelech 26:1-11
 - 4. Isaac's wells 26:12-33
 - 5. Jacob's deception for Isaac's blessing 26:34—28:9
 - 6. Jacob's vision at Bethel 28:10-22
 - 7. Jacob's marriages and Laban's deception 29:1-30
 - 8. Jacob's mishandling of God's blessings 29:31—30:24
 - 9. Jacob's new contract with Laban 30:25-43
 - 10. Jacob's flight from Haran ch. 31
 - 11. Jacob's attempt to appease Esau 32:1-21
 - 12. Jacob at the Jabbok 32:22-32
 - 13. Jacob's meeting with Esau and his return to Canaan ch. 33
 - 14. The rape of Dinah and the revenge of Simeon and Levi ch. 34
 - 15. Jacob's return to Bethel 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—50:26¹⁸

MESSAGE

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

A young boy burst into the living room and announced to his father, "I know what the Bible means!" His father smiled and replied, "What do you mean, you 'know' what the Bible means?" His son replied, "I do know!" "Okay," said the father, "Tell me what the Bible means." "It's easy, Daddy. It stands for 'Basic Information Before Leaving Earth.'"

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

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

Genesis reveals that God originally intended people to have an immediate relationship with their Creator. Evidences for this are that God made man as a special creation (2:7). Second, He made man with special care (2:7). Third, He made man in His own image

¹⁸John 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.

(1:26-27). Fourth, He regarded man as His son (1:28-30). And fifth, He consistently demonstrated concern for man's welfare (3:9).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Pentateuch is all about God, man, and our relationship. The key concept in Genesis is faith.¹⁹

¹⁹See G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:1:13-26.

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."²⁰

"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."²¹

"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."²²

"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 agreement. Indeed Genesis and the ancient Near East probably have more

²⁰Mathews, p. 60.

²¹Sailhamer, p. 19. Cf. Mathews, p. 77.

²²Whybray, pp. 36-37. See Gordon H. Johnston, "Genesis 1 and Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:658 (April-June 2008):178-94; and Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation*.

in common with each other than either has with modern secular thought."²³

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.²⁴ 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)."²⁵

Historical narrative is one of several biblical types of literature (French *genre*). Other *genre* include genealogy, poetry, epistolary, and apocalyptic.²⁶

"Genre is of crucial importance, since the reader's identification of a text's genre directs his or her reading strategy . . ."²⁷

"For the most part, its [the Old Testament's] contents may be described under two rubrics: stories and poems."²⁸

"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."²⁹

"The prose narratives of the Old Testament are multifunctional. Most intend to impart historically accurate information while leading the reader to a deeper theological understanding of the nature of God and his relationship with his people."³⁰

²³Wenham, p. xlvi.

²⁴Ross, *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.

²⁵John 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.

²⁶See J. Daniel Hayes, "An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:661 (January-March 2009):3-18; and Steven D. Mathewson, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming Old Testament Narratives," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:616 (October-December 1997):410-35, for help in preaching narrative portions of the Old Testament.

²⁷Longman and Dillard, p. 29. See *ibid.*, pp. 29-31, for clarification of genre.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁹Mathews, p. 113.

³⁰Longman and Dillard, p. 34.

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. Then God began *fashioning* the earth, and it became fully formed, as we *now* know it, in verse 2 or verse 3. This "double-creation" view may or may not involve a gap in time between verses 1 and 2.³¹ Some advocates of this view believe that the original creation became chaotic as a result of divine judgment. More information on this theory follows in my comments on 1:2.
2. Verse 1 describes *part* of what God did on the first day of creation (1:1-5). It is a general statement followed by specific details.³²
3. Verse 1 describes, in very general, introductory terms, the same creation activity that God did on *all six days* of creation (1:2-31). It is a topic sentence that introduces the whole creation account that follows.³³ I prefer this view.

The "beginning" is the beginning of the creation of the *cosmos* (physical universe), not the beginning of all things (cf. Mark 1:1; John 1:1). This appears to be clear from the context. Genesis has been called "the book of beginnings" because it records the beginning of so many things. Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe it as "the book of foundations."

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

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

³¹Advocates 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.

³²Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*; Wenham; John Davis, *From Paradise to Prison*; et al.

³³George Bush, *Notes on Genesis*; Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*; Bruce K. Waltke, *Creation and Chaos*; idem, *Genesis*; Ross; Hamilton; et al.

(despite the common translation); it is a similar intensification of the pronoun which describes God."³⁴

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 single word in Hebrew for "universe." This is a 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).³⁵

This verse is important because it contradicts six popular philosophies:

1. Atheism || God does exist.
2. Pantheism || God is distinct from His creation.
3. Polytheism || "Created" is singular in the text. An obvious difference between the biblical account of creation and those of other ancient Near Eastern cultures is that the biblical account is monotheistic.
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).³⁶

The emphasis in this verse is on the origin of the universe. God created it.³⁷ He alone is eternal, and everything else owes its origin and existence to Him.³⁸

2. Conditions at the time of creation 1:2

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

³⁴E-mail from Ronald B. Allen, August 31, 2006.

³⁵Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 19.

³⁶See Jack Cottrell, "The Doctrine of Creation from Nothing," *The Seminary Review* 29:4 (December 1983):157-75; and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:14:20.

³⁷Walter 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.

³⁸Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 20.

". . . no clear biblical text testifies to the origins of chaos or of the Serpent, nor to the reason for their existence."³⁹

"Deep" (*tahom*) describes the water-covered planet. In the Old Testament, *tahom* refers to the ocean(s), 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 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."⁴⁰

Some scholars believe that references to "the Spirit" of God in the Old Testament indicate the *power* or *influence* of God, not the Third Person of the Trinity. Some conservative scholars believe that, even though the Spirit was actually the Third Person of the Trinity, people living during the Old Testament period did not associate the Spirit with *God Himself*. They supposedly thought of the Spirit as a power or influence of God. However, there are several indications in the Old Testament that informed Israelites identified "the Spirit" as *God* (cf. Gen. 1:2; 2 Kings 2:9; Ps. 104:30; Ezek. 3:12-14; 11:1; Zech. 4:6).⁴¹

On the basis of comparison with Deuteronomy 32:11 and the Aqhat Epic, W. F. Albright believed that "moving" would better read "soaring," like an eagle.⁴²

"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 unorganized, unproductive, and uninhabited), before God graciously prepared it for human habitation (cf. Isa. 45:18; Jer. 4:23-27). A "hendiadys" is a figure of speech, in which the writer expresses a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and," rather than by using an adjective and a substantive.

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 also we believers are to do our work *by His Spirit* (Zech. 4:6; Rom. 8; Eph. 5:18).

³⁹Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 181.

⁴⁰Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes . . .," pp. 80-81.

⁴¹See Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, and idem, *The Prophets of Israel*, pp. 85-87.

⁴²W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p. 235.

"Hitherto all is static, lifeless, immobile. Motion, which is the essential element in change, originates with God's dynamic presence."⁴³

Verse 2 seems to me to describe conditions that existed before God created the earth. Whereas verse 1 summarizes the entire creation of the universe, verse 2 pictures its pre-creation condition. Verses 3-31 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 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.

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 preadamic race of humans inhabited this original creation.
4. Lucifer (unfallen Satan), whose "headquarters" was in the Garden of Eden, ruled over this race of people.
5. When Lucifer rebelled—many advocates see this in Isaiah 14 and or Ezekiel 28—sin entered the world.
6. Part of God's judgment of this rebellion was the destruction of the earth with a flood (in Noah's day) followed by a global ice age, which accounts for the fossils.⁴⁴

History: This is a very old theory that certain early Jewish writers and some church fathers held. Thomas Chalmers promoted it in 1814.⁴⁵ Chalmers' purpose was to harmonize Scripture with Scripture, not Scripture with science.⁴⁶ Darwin's *Origin of Species* first appeared in 1859, but Chalmers published his theory in 1814. Franz Delitzsch supported it in 1899.⁴⁷ 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."⁴⁸ Harry Rimmer supported it⁴⁹ as did Arthur W. Pink.⁵⁰ L. S. Chafer held it⁵¹ but did not emphasize it. Arthur Custance is one writer who has defended it fairly recently.⁵²

⁴³Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 7.

⁴⁴For a creationist explanation of the ice ages, see Ken Ham, Andrew Snelling, and Carl Wieland, *The Answers Book*, pp. 12-13, 77-87.

⁴⁵See his *Daily Scripture Readings*, 1:1.

⁴⁶Waltke, *Creation and . . .*, p. 20.

⁴⁷Franz Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology*, p. 74-76.

⁴⁸John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood*, p. 92.

⁴⁹*Modern Science and the Genesis Record*, 1941.

⁵⁰*Gleanings in Genesis*, 1922

⁵¹*Systematic Theology*, 1947-48, 6:67.

⁵²*Without Form and Void*, 1970.

Arguments and Responses:

1. The first word in verse 2 (Heb. *waw*, "and") is a conjunction that indicates consecutive occurrences. (This verbal form, by the way, is the basic characteristic of narrative in the Hebrew Bible.⁵³) 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). This is a *waw* disjunctive, not a *waw* consecutive. A better translation of the *waw* would be "now." In short, the Hebrew grammar does not support a chronological gap between verses 1 and 2.
2. The verb (*hayata*, "was") can and should read "became." The translators have rendered it this way in many other places in the Old Testament. **Response.** This is a legitimate translation, but "became" is not always the best translation (cf. Jonah 3:3; Zech. 3:3). Here the translation should be "was."
3. The chaos (*tohu wa bohu*, "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; et al.). This supports the badness of the condition that resulted from Satan's rebellion. **Response.** This is true in some cases, but not always (cf. Ps. 104:19-24). Furthermore, "evening" 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.⁵⁴ Thus, *bara* and *asah* are very close together in meaning. We should not distinguish them on the basis of *bara* describing primary creative activity and *asah* referring to the reforming of previously existing material.

⁵³Longman and Dillard, p. 54.

⁵⁴See Thomas J. Finley, "Dimensions of the Hebrew Word for 'Create' (*bara*)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:592 (October-December 1991):409-23.

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

Summary: Though many evangelicals still hold the gap theory, few Hebrew scholars do because the Hebrew grammar does not favor a chronologically sequential reading of verses 1 and 2. Rather, verse 2 in some way clarifies verse 1.⁵⁵

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.

1. The chaos was a condition that resulted *after* God judged the earth that He had originally created good.⁵⁶

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 good.⁵⁷

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 bringing order out of chaos, which continued through the six creative days.

⁵⁵For 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.

⁵⁶Chalmers, Keil and Delitzsch, Pember, Scofield, Custance, et al., favored this interpretation.

⁵⁷Luther; 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.

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 the earth good.⁵⁸

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*."⁵⁹

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

1. View 2 above: God created the earth in a formless and void state. He then proceeded to give it form and to fill it.⁶⁰

"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]."⁶¹

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.⁶²

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

⁵⁸Bush; Waltke, *Creation and . . .*; idem, *Genesis*; Ross; Sailhamer, "Genesis"; et al.; advocated this view.

⁵⁹ Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes . . .," p. 77.

⁶⁰Young, et al.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 14.

⁶²Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, p. 30.

2. View 3 above: Before God created the earth there was nothing where it now exists, and verse 2 describes that nothingness.⁶³

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

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

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.⁶⁴ In the first three "days," God made the uninhabitable earth productive, and in the last three "days," He filled the uninhabited earth with life. The process of creation, as Moses described it, typically follows this pattern for each day of creation: announcement, commandment, separation, report, naming, evaluation, and chronological framework.⁶⁵

One writer 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 3.⁶⁶ However, this explanation does violence to the Hebrew text.⁶⁷

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.

"The goal of divine action is to maintain and to create life; to achieve this aim Yahweh chiefly avails himself of two means which we encounter in varying intensities in all the realms of his manifestation: the Spirit [v. 2] and the Word."⁶⁸

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

⁶³Waltke, et al.

⁶⁴See Mathews, p. 124.

⁶⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 56.

⁶⁶Gorman Gray, *The Age of the Universe: What Are the Biblical Limits?*

⁶⁷For 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.

⁶⁸Jacob, p. 121.

of God, was the Creator (John 1:3). The theme of God's word (spoken, written, or incarnate) continues throughout the Bible. His word is consistently powerful, as here. *Fiat* (the Latin word for "Let there be") *creation* means creation that came into being by God's word.

"The idea of creation by the word preserves first of all the most radical essential distinction between Creator and creature. Creation cannot be even remotely considered an emanation from God . . . but is rather a product of his personal will."⁶⁹

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).⁷⁰ Perhaps God created the sun on the first day, but it became visible on the fourth day.⁷¹ A third view is that God created the sun, moon, and stars on the first day and assigned them their specific functions on the fourth day (cf. vv. 14-18).⁷²

A principle theme of the Bible appears here. God is the One who brings light into darkness. Here He produced physical light, but later He sent His Son to be the Light of the World (John 8:12). In the future, there will be no darkness at all (Rev. 21:23).⁷³

1:4 "Darkness" was not a creation, like light, but rather 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 those good things for him (loving). This not only reveals aspects of the Creator's character, but it also prepares the reader for the tragedy of the Fall (ch. 3).

1:5 God *named* things ("called" them *such and such*), in addition to creating them. Having a name equals having existence, 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 Israelites regarded the number "seven" as connoting a complete, divine act, as will become clear later.

The terms "day," "night," "evening," and "morning" imply the beginning of the earth's rotation on the first day.⁷⁴ The use of the Hebrew word *'ehad* ("one" [first] day; cf. "second day," "third day," etc.) as an ordinal number

⁶⁹Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 51-52.

⁷⁰Hamilton, p. 121.

⁷¹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 26.

⁷²*Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

⁷³*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 4.

⁷⁴See my further comments on 2:3.

also supports this view.⁷⁵ The Jews reckoned the beginning of a day with the evening rather than the morning.

"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."⁷⁶

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."⁷⁷

From the beginning God made divisions. He later divided the clean from the unclean, 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 (lit. "something stretched out"; i.e., the *sky*, comprising the atmosphere, the solar system, and the universe beyond). Moses called it the "firmament" (AV) or "sky" (NIV). God placed the sun, moon, and stars in it (vv. 16-17). The ancients grouped the stars and planets together, referring to the former as fixed stars and the latter as wandering stars (cf. Jude 13).
- 1:7 God "separated the waters," so that some of them remained on the earth in a liquid state, and some were above the earth as moisture in the atmosphere. Before He made this division there may have been a dense fog over the whole surface of the earth.⁷⁸
- 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).

⁷⁵See 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.).

⁷⁶Frances Schaeffer, *Genesis in Time and Space*, pp. 28-29.

⁷⁷Lance Morrow, *Time* (Feb. 5, 1979), p. 149.

⁷⁸See my comments on the "canopy theory" at 2:4-6.

The third day 1:9-13

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

1:10 "Good" indicates beauty as well as purpose and order.⁷⁹ 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. A good God provided a good land for good 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 seed[s] in them," the original creation evidently had the appearance of age. He created trees with rings and Adam an adult.⁸⁰ Why did Moses mention only the kind of shrubs and trees that *bear seeds and fruits*? Perhaps he did so because these are the ones that provide food for man. He created others, of course, but Moses was stressing God's care for humans. Another possibility is that plants (grass) and trees encompass *all* "vegetation." The presence of "seed" also shows that God intended the vegetation to reproduce.

Some 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 the reader will interpret them in harmony with their customary meanings.

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. Creationists generally affirm *microevolution* (the development of different varieties of plants and animals through crossbreeding), but deny *macroevolution* (the development of all plants from one plant, animals from plants, and humans from animals).

⁷⁹See von Rad, p. 50.

⁸⁰See Whitcomb and Morris, pp. 232-39.

"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."⁸¹

Note that on the first and second days, God did one creative work each day: He created light and the firmament. On the third day, He did two works: He created the land and vegetation. Similarly, on the fourth and fifth days, God did one work each day: He created the lights and their functions on the fourth day, and the birds and fish on the fifth day. Then on the sixth day, He again did two works: He created the land animals and man.⁸² On the first three days He gave form to what was formless, and on the last three days He filled what was void.

"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."⁸³

The fourth day 1:14-19

The luminaries (lights, objects that shine) served four purposes.

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

"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."⁸⁴

"Here is a stern warning for our times for any who would seek the stars in charting their lives."⁸⁵

"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

⁸¹Hamilton, p. 126.

⁸²Ibid., p. 125.

⁸³Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 36.

⁸⁴Mathews, p. 154.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 155.

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)."⁸⁶

Moses did not mean that they were the signs of the zodiac or astrological signs. Why did Moses use the terms "greater" and "lesser light(s)" to describe the *sun* and *moon* (v. 16)? He probably did so because these Hebrew words, which are very similar in other Semitic languages, are also the names of pagan gods.⁸⁷ He wanted the Israelites to appreciate the fact that their God had created the entities their pagan neighbors worshipped as gods.

". . . the biblical creation story gives the stars only the barest mention, as though the writer shrugged and said, 'And, oh, yes. He also made the stars.'"⁸⁸

"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."⁸⁹

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."⁹⁰

The writer's perspective throughout is geocentric (earth-oriented) rather than heliocentric (sun-oriented). He used phenomenological language (of appearance) that is very common in the Old Testament. Even modern scientific textbooks use such language without fear of being criticized as unscientific, when they refer to "sunrise," "sunset," etc. Perhaps

⁸⁶Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes . . .," p. 79.

⁸⁷Hamilton, p.127. See G. Hasel, "The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974):81-102.

⁸⁸*The Nelson . . .*, p. 5.

⁸⁹Wenham, p. 23.

⁹⁰Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes . . .," p. 80.

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.⁹¹

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.⁹² 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 are under God's authority. The Old Testament writers adopted pagan imagery, but not pagan theology.

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 (12:2-3; 17:16, 20, etc.). God's blessing is most obviously visible in the gift of children, as this is often coupled with 'being fruitful and multiplying.' But all aspects of life can express this blessing: crops, family, and nation (Deut 28:1-14). Where modern man talks of success, OT man talked of blessing."⁹³

Interestingly, this first mention of God's blessing—"God blessed them"—refers to fish and birds! These creatures also had the capability to reproduce themselves (cf. v. 12). Birds and fish rule their respective realms by multiplying.⁹⁴

The sixth day 1:24-31

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

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

⁹¹Idem, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 93.

⁹²D. 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.

⁹³Wenham, p. 24.

⁹⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 63.

What happened to the dinosaurs? Conservative Bible interpreters generally believe they existed, having been created either prior to, or along with, the other animals, but that they became extinct before the Flood or 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."⁹⁵

1:26-27 "Us" is probably a plural of intensification (or majesty; see my comment on verse 1 above), though some regard it as a plural of self-deliberation (cf. 11:7; Ps. 2:3).⁹⁶ Others believe that God was addressing His heavenly court (cf. Isa. 6:8).⁹⁷ However, "us" does not include the angels, since God made man in His image alone—not also in the image of angels. "Us" 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.⁹⁸

"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."⁹⁹

The theological controversy in Moses' day was not between trinitarianism and unitarianism but between one self-existent, sovereign, good God—and many limited, capricious, often wicked gods.¹⁰⁰

"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

⁹⁵Ham, et al., p. 10. See also pp. 21-39.

⁹⁶E.g., Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1—11: A Commentary*, p. 145.

⁹⁷The NET Bible note on 1:26.

⁹⁸See Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 112; Wenham, pp. 27-27; Oswald Allis, *God Spoke by Moses*, p. 13.

⁹⁹Mathews, p. 163. Cf. Calvin, 1:13:24.

¹⁰⁰Hamilton, p. 133.

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."¹⁰¹

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

"Man" refers to mankind, not Adam individually (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 and Eve were not "androgynous" (i.e., two individuals joined physically like Siamese twins), or each of them "a hermaphrodite" (i.e., one individual possessing both male and female sexual organs). There is no basis for these bizarre ideas in the text. God formed Eve from Adam's rib, not from half of his body or from his genitals.

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

"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."¹⁰²

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

¹⁰¹Sailhamer, "Exegetical Notes . . .," p. 80.

¹⁰²Henry F. Lazenby, "The Image of God: Masculine, Feminine, or Neuter?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:1 (March 1987):67, 66.

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.¹⁰³

"Image" and "likeness" are essentially synonymous terms.¹⁰⁴ 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."¹⁰⁵ In another sense man *is* the image of God (e.g., he rules and creates [procreates] as God does, thus reflecting God).¹⁰⁶ The Fall obscured but did not obliterate the image of God in man.¹⁰⁷

"What is the image of God in man? The traditional view is that God's image is certain moral, ethical, and intellectual abilities. A more recent view, based on Hebrew grammar and the knowledge of the ancient Middle East, interprets the phrase as meaning 'Let us make man *as* our image' (the Hebrew preposition in this phrase can be translated *as*). In ancient times an emperor might command statues of himself to be placed in remote parts of his empire. These symbols would declare that these areas were under his power and reign. So God placed humankind as living symbols of Himself on earth to represent His reign. This interpretation fits well with the command that follows—to reign over all that God has made."¹⁰⁸

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

"Most theologians have recognized that that [*sic*] we cannot interpret it [i.e., the phrase 'the image of God'] literally—that is, that man's physical being is in the image of God. Such an interpretation should be rejected for at least four reasons. In the first place, we are told elsewhere that God is a spirit (John 4:24; Isa. 31:3) and that he is ubiquitous

¹⁰³Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 38.

¹⁰⁴See Calvin, 1:15:3.

¹⁰⁵E.g., Keil 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, 1:77-79; Mathews, pp. 164-72.

¹⁰⁶See James Jordan, "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis," *Christianity and Civilization* 3 (Summer 1983):38-80. See also Merrill, pp. 14-16.

¹⁰⁷See Calvin, 1:15:4; Jacob, pp. 166-72; John F. Kilner, "Humanity in God's Image: Is the Image Really Damaged?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53:3 (September 2010):601-17.

¹⁰⁸*The Nelson . . .*, p. 5.

(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."¹⁰⁹

". . . although God's glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul."¹¹⁰

Verse 27 may be the first poem in the Bible. If so, the shift to poetry may emphasize human beings as God's image bearers. There is some disagreement among Old Testament scholars regarding what distinguishes biblical poetry from biblical prose.¹¹¹

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.¹¹² 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.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹Bruce K. Waltke, "Reflections from the Old Testament on Abortion," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19:1 (Winter 1976):8. His quotation is from R. F. R. Gardener, *Abortion: The Personal Dilemma*. See also Waltke's helpful discussion of image and likeness in *Genesis*, p. 65-66. For the view that the image of God includes the body, see Jonathan F. Henry, "Man in God's Image: What Does it Mean?" *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 12:37 (December 2008):5-24.

¹¹⁰Calvin, 1:15:3. See also *ibid.*, 1:15:4.

¹¹¹See Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, pp. 9-54, for a discussion of the subject.

¹¹²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 38.

¹¹³Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 67.

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.¹¹⁴ 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. It was to Adam and Eve as heads of the human race that God gave this command.

"This command, like others in Scripture, carries with it an implicit promise that God will enable man to fulfill it."¹¹⁵

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

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

"Subdue" and "rule," the second aspect of this mandate, imply a degree of sovereignty and control that God delegated to man over nature.¹¹⁶ This constitutes God's "Magna Carta" 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."¹¹⁷

"Why this need to subjugate the earth? There are at least four possibilities: (1) Sin would ruin the earth, and people would have to expend great effort to live there (see 3:17-

¹¹⁴For a good book on childlessness, see Vicky Love, *Childless Is Not Less*.

¹¹⁵Wenham, p. 33.

¹¹⁶See Eric Sauer, *King of the Earth*. Cf. Heb. 2:8-9.

¹¹⁷Davis, p. 81.

19). (2) Satan would defy the will of God and make all good efforts difficult. (3) The earth left to itself would not remain good. Instead, God planned that people would need to manage and control it. (4) The beauty of the earth was only in the garden that God planted (see 2:8); the rest of the earth would be hostile. Whatever the case, subdue does not mean 'destroy' or 'ruin.' It does mean to 'act as managers who have the authority to run everything as God planned.' This command applies equally to male and female."¹¹⁸

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

"Our Christian proclamation of hope has antecedents in the theological soil of three divine programmatic expectations first heard in Genesis: (1) God will bless the human family with procreation and dominion (1:26-28); (2) he will achieve victory over mankind's enemy (3:15); and (3) he will bring about both through the offspring of Abraham (12:1-3)—namely, the one man Jesus Christ."¹¹⁹

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

Whereas specific human responsibilities change as divine revelation unfolds, and dispensation succeeds dispensation, people have a continuing responsibility to live in the light of previous revelation. For example, even though the dispensation of the Mosaic Law has ended, Christians are nevertheless helped to discharge their 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

¹¹⁸*The Nelson . . .*, p. 6.

¹¹⁹Mathews, p. 22.

people under a specific rule of conduct, *not as a condition for salvation*, but to demonstrate that people always fail to live up to God's standards—and so need to accept the salvation that God extends to them as a gift. I believe that seven dispensations are distinguishable in Scripture, which are: (1) Innocence (Gen. 1:28); (2) Conscience (Gen. 3:7); (3) Human Government (Gen. 8:15); (4) Promise (Gen. 12:1); (5) Law (Exod. 19:1); (6) Church (Acts 2:1); and (7) Kingdom (Rev. 20:4).

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 (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3), but Adam sinned deliberately (cf. 1 Tim. 2:14). This dispensation ended when God judged Adam and Eve guilty, and expelled them from the Garden of Eden (3:24).

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.¹²⁰ 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)."¹²¹

Verse 29 suggests that man was originally a vegetarian. After the Flood, God told man that he could eat animals (9:3). The animals may also have been herbivorous at first (v. 30).¹²²

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 (two versions that differ) of the creation story, but they illustrate the writer's purpose. In chapter 1, he wanted to emphasize the creation of humankind in the larger context of the *cosmic* creation. Note that "good" appears seven times in this chapter (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), highlighting the *goodness* of God in blessing His creation—especially man.

"Some people ask, 'How can God be good when there is so much evil and suffering in the world?' The answer is that God made a perfect world and man messed it up!"¹²³

¹²⁰See Gina Hens-Piazza, "A Theology of Ecology: God's Image and the Natural World," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13:4 (October 1983):107–110.

¹²¹Wenham, p. xlix.

¹²²See Ham, et al., pp. 29-30.

¹²³Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Pentateuch," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 91.

There are three *major* viewpoints regarding the origin of man as recorded in 1:26-31; 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.¹²⁴
2. "Theistic evolution" attempts to blend Scripture and scientific theories. It holds that God ordered and directed the evolutionary process. This view fails to explain specific statements in the text of Scripture adequately; 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.¹²⁵
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.¹²⁶

"Progressive creationism" teaches that God created the universe in several acts of creation that time periods of indefinite duration separated. The process of evolution was at work within these eras and accounts for the development of phyla, species, etc.¹²⁷ 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

¹²⁴See John C. Hutchison, "Darwin's Evolutionary Theory and 19th-Century Natural Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):334-54.

¹²⁵Representative evangelicals who hold this view include Kidner; Waltke, *An Old . . .*, p. 202; 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.

¹²⁶Representatives include Bush, Davis, Schaeffer, 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.

¹²⁷See 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*.

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."¹²⁸

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."¹²⁹

The mood of the narrative also returns to what it was in 1:1-2. Silence and calm prevail again.¹³⁰

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."¹³¹ "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 because He had finished His work (cf. Isa. 40:28-29).

"Unquestionably, the number *seven* marks in Scripture the sacred measurement of time."¹³²

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

¹²⁸Russell 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; and W. I. LaSor, "Biblical Creationism," *Asbury Theological Journal* 42:2 (1987):7-20.

¹²⁹Wenham, p. 5.

¹³⁰Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, p. 9.

¹³¹Bush, p. 46.

¹³²Edershiem, p. 195. See his "Chapter X: Festive Cycles and Arrangement of the Calendar," pp. 195-207.

". . . 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)."¹³³

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.¹³⁴

"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."¹³⁵

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."¹³⁶

The sabbatical and jubilee years in ancient Judaism also pointed to the liberation Messiah would provide for His people.¹³⁷

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

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

¹³³Wenham, pp. xlix-l.

¹³⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 39.

¹³⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 67.

¹³⁶Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Sabbatical Typologies of Messianic Redemption," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17:2 (December 1986):155, 165.

¹³⁷See 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.

'earth' 21 times, 'heaven/firmament' 21 times, while the phrases 'and it was so' and 'God saw that it was good' occur 7 times."¹³⁸

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 to 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."¹³⁹

Moses used "day" these three ways in Genesis 1 and 2: (1) a 12-hour period of daylight (1:5, 14, 16, 18), (2) a 24-hour day (1:14), and (3) the entire seven-day period of creation (2:4). A few scholars have argued that the sequence of days is not chronologically ordered at all.¹⁴⁰ They believe that Moses numbered the days on the basis of content rather than sequence in time. This view has not enjoyed wide acceptance. Other scholars believe there is some dischronologization in the text.¹⁴¹ There are four major views as to the length of the days of creation.

1. **The literal 24-hour day theory.** The normal conclusion one would most likely draw from the terminology in the text (e.g., evening, morning, day, night, etc.) is that God created the world in six 24-hour days. 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.¹⁴² 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.¹⁴³
2. **The day-age (or geologic day) theory.** This view interprets the terminology less literally. Advocates argue that the events recorded seem to require more than 24-hour days (e.g., v. 12). They also point out that solar days may not have begun until the fourth day. Some advocates of this theory are theistic evolutionists. Others are progressive creationists. Progressive creationists generally seek to

¹³⁸Wenham, p. 6.

¹³⁹Schaeffer, p. 57.

¹⁴⁰E.g., D. A. Sterchi, "Does Genesis 1 Provide a Chronological Sequence?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:4 (December 1996):529-36; and M. Throntveit, "Are the Events in the Genesis Account Set Forth in Chronological Order? No," in *The Genesis Debate*, pp. 36-55.

¹⁴¹E.g., Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 75-78; and H. Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 78.

¹⁴²See Ham, et al., pp. 13-14, 89-101.

¹⁴³See Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 109.

correlate the geologic ages with the six days of creation. The main problem with the day-age theory is that it interprets terms *figuratively* that seem to have obvious literal meaning.

3. **The literal days with intervening ages theory.** This view regards each day as a time of completion of creative activity only. It is an attempt to take the "morning and evening" references seriously but still allow the time that seems necessary within the days (e.g., v. 12). It is a combination of the two preceding views. However, it strains the text. Also, Moses could have described this method of creation more clearly than he did if long ages interspersed the six days. Few scholars have adopted this view.
4. **The revelatory day theory.** The least literal interpretation holds that God revealed, rather than accomplished, creation in six days. A major problem with this view is Exodus 20:11, where Moses says that God "made," not "revealed," His creation in six days. A variation of this view understands the days as "structures of a literary framework designed to illustrate the orderly nature of God's creation and to enable the covenant people to mime the Creator."¹⁴⁴

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.¹⁴⁵ No theory explains the conflict between biblical statements and scientific statements adequately. In the end, one really is forced to ask: "Do I put more confidence in what God says or in what scientists say?"¹⁴⁶ 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.¹⁴⁷ Other equally qualified inerrantists see a young earth model in the Bible.¹⁴⁸ One writer gave biographical information about Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656), whose chronology appeared first in the 1701 edition of the AV and later in the margin of the

¹⁴⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 61.

¹⁴⁵See John Klotz, *Modern Science in the Christian Life*, pp. 111-12.

¹⁴⁶See Duane T. Gish, "Evolution—A Philosophy, Not a Science," *Good News Broadcaster* (March 1984), pp. 34-37.

¹⁴⁷E.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.

¹⁴⁸E.g., Calvin, 1:14:1; and 3:21:4; John Klotz, *Genes, Genesis, and Evolution*; Robert Kofahl and Kelly Segraves, *The Creation Explanation*; Henry Morris, *Science, Scripture and the Young Earth*; John Whitcomb, *The Early Earth*; and John D. Morris, *The Young Earth*.

original Scofield Reference Bible. He also gave an explanation of how Ussher arrived at his dates and a table listing the dates of the more important events in Old Testament history contained in Ussher's chronology.¹⁴⁹

"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."¹⁵⁰

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.¹⁵¹

Where did the names we use for the days of the week come from? The days of the week originally received their names in honor of seven pagan gods, whom the ancients associated with the five major planets plus the sun and moon. The names of Germanic (Teutonic) gods replaced those of some Roman gods as time passed. The early church, following Jewish custom, numbered the days of the week to avoid using the names of pagan gods (e.g., Luke 24:1; Acts 20:7).¹⁵²

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

¹⁴⁹James Barr, "Why the World was Created in 4004 B.C.: Archbishop Ussher and Biblical Chronology," *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67:2 (Spring 1985):575-608.

¹⁵⁰Frederic Howe, "The Age of the Earth: An Appraisal of Some Current Evangelical Positions, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):121. Both parts 1 and 2 of this fine article are very helpful. On the importance of having the correct concept of origins, see Ralph E. Ancil, "Is Creation More Than a Biological Model of Origins?" *Creation Social Science and Humanities Review* 5:2 (Winter 1982):3-13. See also Ernest Lucas, "Miracles and natural laws," *Christian ARENA* (September 1985):7-10.

¹⁵¹See Appendix 1 at the end of these notes for a summary of five popular views of Creation.

¹⁵²See 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."¹⁵³

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 the 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*.¹⁵⁴ 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."¹⁵⁵

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

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

"The section begins with a description of the creation of Adam and Eve and traces their sin, God's curse on sin, and the expansion of sin in their descendants. No longer at rest, mankind experienced flight and fear,

¹⁵³Wenham, p. liii.

¹⁵⁴See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 62-65, for discussion of the Old Babylonian account of creation: *Enuma elish*.

¹⁵⁵Ross, *Creation and . . .*, pp. 114-15.

making his way in the world, surviving, and developing civilization. As if in answer to the blessings of Creation, this passage supplies a threefold cursing (of Satan [3:14], of the ground because of man [3:17], and of Cain [4:11]).

"Yet in this deteriorating life there is a token of grace (4:15) and a ray of hope (man began to call on Yahweh)."¹⁵⁶

1. The Garden of Eden 2:4—3:24

This story has seven scenes that a change in actors, situations or activities identifies.¹⁵⁷ 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.¹⁵⁸

- A** Scene 1 (narrative): God is the sole actor, and man is passive (2:4-17).
- B** Scene 2 (narrative): God is the main actor, man plays a minor role, the woman and the animals are passive (2:18-25).
- C** Scene 3 (dialogue): The snake and the woman converse (3:1-5).
- D** Scene 4 (narrative): The man and the woman are primary (3:6-8).
- C'** Scene 5 (dialogue): God converses with the man and the woman (3:9-13).
- 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."¹⁵⁹

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

¹⁵⁶Idem, "Genesis," p. 24.

¹⁵⁷For a different narrative analysis, see Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 80-81.

¹⁵⁸Wenham, p. 50.

¹⁵⁹Schaeffer, pp. 40-41.

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

Moses identified "Yahweh," the God who called Abraham (12:1) and who delivered Israel from Egypt (Exod. 3:15), with "Elohim," the God who created the cosmos.¹⁶⁰ The name "Jehovah" comes from combining the *vowels* of the Hebrew *adonay* ("Lord") with the *consonants* of the Hebrew *Yahweh* (i.e., YHWH).

"In Genesis 1 *'elohim* (God) refers to God's transcendence over the world, while in Genesis 2—3 *yhwh* (LORD) speaks of God's immanence with his elect. When the narrator combines the two names, he makes a bold assertion that the Creation God is the Lord of Israel's history. Just as God ordered creation, he orders history. All is under God's sovereign control, guaranteeing that Israel's history will end in triumph, not in tragedy."¹⁶¹

The creation of man 2:4-17

The 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. But the similarities between these sections argue for a common writer.¹⁶²

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

"The destiny of the human creation is to live in God's world, with God's other creatures, *on God's terms*."¹⁶³

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

¹⁶⁰Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 20.

¹⁶¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 34.

¹⁶²See William H. Shea, "Literary Structural Parallels between Genesis 1 and 2," *Origins* 16:2(1989):49-68.

¹⁶³W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 40.

the major structural and conceptual framework for the whole Book of Genesis.¹⁶⁴

". . . the material within each *tol'dot* is a microcosm of the development of the Book of Genesis itself, with the motifs of blessing and cursing playing a dominant role. Within each of the first several *tol'dot* is a deterioration to cursing until 12:1-12, where the message moves to the promise of blessing. From this point on there is a constant striving for the place of blessing, but still with each successive narrative there is deterioration, for Isaac and Jacob did not measure up to Abraham. Consequently at the end of Genesis the family is not in the land of blessing but in Egypt."¹⁶⁵

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

2:5-6 These verses describe global conditions, before *man's* creation, in terms that stress God's gracious preparation of the world for him. They are a flashback to conditions before 1:26. Moses chose terms that contrast with conditions that existed after the Fall.¹⁶⁶ "Shrubs" were evidently not edible, whereas "plants" were. Thus Moses distinguished two types of land: arable and non-arable.¹⁶⁷

Moses' reference to "rain" anticipates the story of the Flood (chs. 6—9). The absence of "rain" and the presence of the "mist" have led some writers to postulate a "canopy theory."¹⁶⁸ 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). This is another of those theories that are impossible to prove or disprove conclusively.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴Cf. Martin Woudstra, "The *Toledot* of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive-Historical Significance," *Calvin Theological Journal* 5:2 (1970):188-89.

¹⁶⁵Ross, "Genesis," p. 24.

¹⁶⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 40.

¹⁶⁷Wenham, p. 58.

¹⁶⁸Whitcomb and Morris; Jody Dillow, *The Waters Above*.

¹⁶⁹For 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.

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

2:7 "Formed" (Heb. *yasar*) means to shape or mold and implies that God deliberately did this with tender loving care. It describes the work of an artist (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.¹⁷⁰ In the Creation, God raised man out of the dust to reign.¹⁷¹ However, in the Fall, man returned to the dust by his own work (3:19).¹⁷²

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). It may also have imparted moral, intellectual, relational, and spiritual capacities.¹⁷³ Adam's life-breath came from God's breath.¹⁷⁴ His uniqueness consisted in his having been made in God's image. God's breath may be a synonym for His word (cf. Ps. 33:6).¹⁷⁵ Man, therefore, is a combination of dust and divinity.¹⁷⁶

2:8-15 Another indication of God's love and grace is that He placed Adam in a garden that He had prepared for him. The God who was powerful enough to create the cosmos with a word (ch. 1) was also a good and loving God (v. 5).

The modern equivalent of the "Pishon" River is unknown for certain. Commentators have suggested that it was the Indus, the Ganges,¹⁷⁷ a river

¹⁷⁰Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 41.

¹⁷¹See W. Brueggemann, "From Dust to Kingship," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972):1-18. See also John M. Soden, "From the Dust: Creating Adam in Historical Context," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:685 (January-March 2015):45-66, for defense of a figurative understanding of the historical Adam's creation.

¹⁷²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 41.

¹⁷³*The Nelson . . .*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁴See Mathews, pp. 197-99.

¹⁷⁵See Ellis R. Brotzman, "Man and the Meaning of *Nephesh* [Soul]," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:580 (October-December 1988):400-9.

¹⁷⁶For defense of the historicity of Adam and Eve, see Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 80, n. 2.

¹⁷⁷Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 1:1:3. Josephus' writings reflect certain traditional Jewish opinions in his day (first century A.D.) and are not always consistent with Scripture.

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 (the region surrounding the river) 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).¹⁷⁸ However, some interpreters believe this site was in the land of the Cassites east of Mesopotamia.¹⁷⁹

The "Tigris" and "Euphrates" are now in the area formerly called Babylonia (Iraq). "Eden" (meaning "delight," "pleasure," or perhaps "place of abundant waters") therefore appears to have been located 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)."¹⁸⁰

The trees in the garden were beautiful ("pleasing to the sight") and edible ("good for food"), an orchard for man to enjoy (v. 9). The "tree of life" appears to have been a means, with its fruit, whereby God sustained Adam 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).¹⁸¹ "Good" and "evil" may be a *merism* for all the things that protect and destroy life. It may mean total knowledge.¹⁸²

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).¹⁸³

The Hebrew word translated "put" in verse 15 (*wayyannihehu*) is not the same one rendered "put" in verse 8 (*wayyasem*). The latter term (v. 8) is the normal one for putting something somewhere. However, the former

¹⁷⁸See 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.

¹⁷⁹E.g., Ross, "Genesis," p. 31.

¹⁸⁰Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 99.

¹⁸¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 86. For some other views, see Hamilton, pp. 164-66; or Wenham, pp. 63-64.

¹⁸²Jacob, p. 284.

¹⁸³Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 43.

one (v. 15) connotes rest and safety (cf. 19:16; Deut. 3:20; 12:10; 25:19), as well as dedication in God's presence (cf. Exod. 16:33-34; Lev. 16:23; Num. 17:4; Deut. 26:4, 10). God *specifically* put man in "the garden," where he could be safe and rest, and where he could have fellowship with God (cf. 3:8). Mankind's primary responsibility there was actually to *worship and obey God*, though not stated, rather than to "cultivate" and "keep" the garden, as many English versions state.¹⁸⁴ Adam *served*—and thereby *worshipped* God—by tending the garden.¹⁸⁵ *Work* is essentially a good gift from 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)."¹⁸⁶

2:16-17 God gave Adam great freedom of choice. Note that He graciously gave him broad permission before changing this to narrow restriction. God 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.¹⁸⁷ Someone posted on their church marquee: "Forbidden fruits create many jams."

"Adam was denied the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to test his obedience and prove that he was willingly under God's command. The very name of the tree shows the sole purpose of the precept was to keep him content with his lot and to prevent him from becoming puffed up with wicked lust. But the promise by which he was bidden to hope for eternal life so long as he ate from the tree of life, and, conversely, the terrible threat of death once he tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, served to prove and exercise his faith."¹⁸⁸

"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."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁸⁵See Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*.

¹⁸⁶Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 85.

¹⁸⁷For a discussion of what God had in mind in the two trees, see Keil and Delitzsch, 1:84-86.

¹⁸⁸Calvin, 2:1:4.

¹⁸⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 46.

"On the whole it seems probable that we should understand 'death' to mean a spiritual state, but a state aptly symbolized by physical death. When man sinned he passed into a new state, one dominated by, and at the same time symbolized by death. It is likely that spiritual death and physical death are not being thought of as separate, so that the one involves the other."¹⁹⁰

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

"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."¹⁹¹

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

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

¹⁹⁰Leon Morris, *The Wages of Sin*, p. 10.

¹⁹¹John F. Walvoord, "The New Covenant," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 187-88.

command: to abstain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The three universal covenants, which affect the whole human race, are the Edenic, Adamic, and Noahic Covenants. All the subsequent covenants affect Israel primarily, though they all affect the rest of humanity secondarily. There are eight major biblical covenants, and they all 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).

"On the plane of human relationships, the truth almost always points to a covenant between two partners who are on an unequal footing; it is the stronger who proposes the *berit* [covenant]."¹⁹²

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

The creation of woman 2:18-25

2:18 Adam's creation was not complete because he lacked a "helper" who corresponded to him. This deficiency led God to pronounce Adam's condition "not good."¹⁹³ 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."¹⁹⁴

God's provision of a wife for Adam is a concrete example of God's knowing what is good for man.¹⁹⁵ 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.

¹⁹²Jacob, p. 210.

¹⁹³For 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.

¹⁹⁴Blu Greenberg, "Marriage in the Jewish Tradition," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22:1 (Winter 1985):3.

¹⁹⁵Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 46.

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). "Helper" 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."¹⁹⁶

"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. She was *comparable* to him, in contrast to the rest of the animal creation.

"Since Adam and Eve were a spiritual unity, living in integrity without sin, there was no need for instruction here on headship."¹⁹⁷

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

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. As God had named things (ch. 1), now Adam demonstrated his right as God's regent to name the animals ("whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name"). He became aware of his own need for a companion as he named the animals.

"Adam" comes from the Hebrew word for "earth" (*adamah*). "Adam" means "one that is red," like the earth.¹⁹⁸ 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

¹⁹⁶Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 88.

¹⁹⁷Ross, "Genesis," p. 31.

¹⁹⁸Josephus, *Antiquities of*, . . . , 1:1:2.

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 ("for Adam there was found no") suitable partner who was comparable to him among them. So 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 "into a deep sleep" (cf. 15:12; 28:11). He evidently did so to assure the recipient that his own works had no part in his receiving it.¹⁹⁹ 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."²⁰⁰

"Similarly, it was observed [by the Rabbis], that God had not formed woman out of the head, lest she should become proud; nor out of the eye, lest she should lust; nor out of the ear, lest she should be curious; nor out of the mouth, lest she should be talkative; nor out of the heart, lest she should be jealous; nor out of the hand, lest she should be covetous; nor out of the foot, lest she be a busybody; but out of the rib, which was always covered. Modesty was, therefore, a prime quality."²⁰¹

"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."²⁰²

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

"That woman was taken from man no more implies the inferiority of woman to man than the taking of man from the ground ('adam from 'adamah) implies the inferiority of man to the ground."²⁰³

¹⁹⁹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 46.

²⁰⁰Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 7.

²⁰¹Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, p. 146.

²⁰²Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I: From Adam to Noah*, p. 134.

²⁰³Merrill, p. 19.

". . . 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."²⁰⁴

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. Moses named Adam by his relation to the ground, but Adam named his wife in relation to himself.

"Name-giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of sovereignty, of command."²⁰⁵

"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."²⁰⁶

"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)."²⁰⁷

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

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

²⁰⁴Wenham, p. 69.

²⁰⁵von Rad, p. 83. George W. Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50:1 (January 1988):24-35, disputed this view.

²⁰⁶Westermann, p. 232.

²⁰⁷Wenham, p. 70.

It also demonstrates unbelief, disobedience, and displeasure with God's character. Your mate needs your unconditional acceptance.

2:24 This verse clarifies God's purpose in marriage. It involves *leaving* parents and cleaving (being "joined") to one's spouse.²⁰⁸

"In Gen 2:24, 'for this cause' did not refer to God's making the first human beings 'male and female,' but to God's making Eve out of Adam's rib. The reason for a man's leaving his father and mother, cleaving to his wife, and becoming one flesh with her was not sexual, then. It had to do with Eve's origin in Adam: since woman came from man, man should unite himself with woman to recapture their original unity."²⁰⁹

". . . 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."²¹⁰

"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 those cultures that gave parental bonds priority over marital bonds.²¹¹ Marriage also involves physical consummation that unites two individuals as "one flesh" in a physical union that symbolized their total unity²¹² in their "new family."²¹³ 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).

²⁰⁸See Mathews, pp. 222-24.

²⁰⁹Robert H. Gundry, *Mark*, pp. 531-32. See Charles A. Clough, "Responding to Government's Declaration that 'Marriage' Is Merely a Social Construct: A Proposal to Reform the Wedding Service in Bible-Believing Churches," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 18:53 (Spring 2014):7-46.

²¹⁰Wenham, p. 70.

²¹¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 90.

²¹²Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2:334.

²¹³The NET Bible note on 2:24.

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, but only with people who commit themselves to us. A transparent person is an open and vulnerable person.

This is a hinge (*janus*) verse. It looks backward into chapter 2 and forward into chapter 3. The similarity of the Hebrew words for naked (*'arom*) and "crafty" (3:1, *'arum*) points to a wordplay. The word here for "nakedness" means unclothed, whereas the one in 3:7 (*'erom*), and elsewhere, describes those under God's judgment (cf. Deut. 28:48; Ezek. 16:39; 23:29).²¹⁴

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 primary 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.²¹⁵

The Bible writers made use of the creation account in many different ways, and we too can use it in these ways for our own personal benefit. These purposes include: glorifying the God of creation, stimulating praise and worship, and fortifying faith in God's

²¹⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 49.

²¹⁵*Family Life Conference*, p. 45.

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.²¹⁶

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 with Adam and Eve, God later placed Israel in a place of blessing. The nation could enjoy His blessing by being obedient and trusting, with the assistance He had provided for them in marriage. 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."²¹⁷

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.²¹⁸

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 normally 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 (Num. 22:21-30).
- c. God judged a snake in this case (v. 14).²¹⁹

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).

²¹⁶Ted S. Rendall, "Using the Creation Account for Maximum Spiritual Profit," *Prairie Overcomer* 60:8 (September 1987):3-5, 22.

²¹⁷Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, pp. 81-82. Cf. 12:1-3, 7.

²¹⁸Idem, "Genesis," pp. 48-49.

²¹⁹See Jacqueline Tabick, "The Snake in the Grass: The Problems of Interpreting a Symbol in the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Writings," *Religion* 16 (April 1986):155-67, who traced the symbolic use of the snake as a servant of God, a symbol of rebellion against God, and a creature independent of God.

- c. What he said here is in character for Satan, who is also called the "father of lies" (John 8:44).

Probably the tempter was actually *Satan*, who in this event 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* and *goodness of character* (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. Satan implied that God's line of protection was actually a line that *He drew* because He was *selfish!* Satan still tempts women to believe that God's role for them is primarily for His benefit rather than for their welfare.²²⁰

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 to doubt God's goodness, because she distorted the word of God. She added to the words "or touch it" (v. 3).

"In her reply to [the serpent's] question, she perverted and misquoted *three times* the divine law to which she and Adam were subject: (1) She disparaged her privileges by misquoting the terms of the Divine *permission* as to the other trees. (2) She overstated the restrictions by misquoting the Divine *prohibition*. (3) She underrated her obligations by misquoting the Divine *penalty*."²²¹

God reveals His character through His Word—both His spoken word, and His written Word. When we do not retain His Word precisely, a distorted concept of God is often 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 mankind.

²²⁰*Family Life . . .*, p. 99.

²²¹W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, p. 48.

"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."²²²

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.

What the serpent said about Eve being "as (like) God (or 'gods')" was a half-truth. Ironically, she was already "like 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 enjoy unhindered fellowship with God (3:24). The consequent separation from God (broken fellowship with God) is the essence of (spiritual) *death* (2:17)—ultimately *eternal death*, and permanent separation for the unsaved.

The first doctrine Satan denied in Scripture was that sin results in death (separation from God); on the negative side, the first false doctrine was that God will not punish sin. This is still the truth that Satan tries the 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 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.

²²²Wenham, p. 57.

"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."²²³

". . . 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."²²⁴

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. Instead of *listening* to the serpent, Eve should have *spoken* to it what God had said (His prohibition), as Jesus did when He was tempted (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

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).
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 illegitimate quest for forbidden wisdom that led Eve to disobey God.²²⁵

Eve saw, coveted, and took the fruit (cf. Josh. 7:21; 2 Sam. 11:2-4). We perceive, 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."²²⁶

²²³Thomas, p. 46.

²²⁴Mathews, p. 226.

²²⁵Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 51.

²²⁶Wenham, p. 75.

"The proposition that an adult can gaze at anything is ludicrous and naive, for gazing is too often followed by desiring and sinning."²²⁷

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.

"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."²²⁸

"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."²²⁹

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.'"²³⁰

God has always asked people to believe and trust His promise 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, just to assure ourselves of its goodness, directly contradicts God's will for us. It is the way of sight rather than the way of faith.

²²⁷Davis, p. 90. Cf. 9:20-27.

²²⁸Hamilton, p. 190.

²²⁹K. Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, p. 27.

²³⁰Thomas, p. 49. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 103.

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

". . . Adam would never have dared oppose God's authority unless he had disbelieved in God's Word."²³¹

"In this integrity [i.e., in his unfallen state] man by free will had the power, if he so willed, to attain eternal life. . . . Yet his choice of good and evil was free, and not that alone, but the highest rectitude was in his mind and will, and all the organic parts were rightly composed to obedience, until in destroying himself he corrupted his own blessings.

"Now we need bear only this in mind: man was far different at the first creation from his whole posterity, who, deriving their origin from him in his corrupted state, have contracted from him a hereditary taint. For, the individual parts of his soul were formed to uprightness, the soundness of his mind stood firm, and his will was free to choose the good. . . . But the reason he [God] did not sustain man by the virtue of perseverance [i.e., keep him from sinning] lies hidden in his plan . . ."²³²

3:7-8 The separation (spiritual death) 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 ("eyes . . . opened . . . knew that they were naked") and "sewed fig leaves together" to hide their differences from each other (v. 7).²³³ 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).

"Jeffrey Niehaus has proposed a different translation of the verse, as follows: 'Then the man and his wife heard the thunder of Yahweh God as he was going back and forth in the garden in the wind of the storm and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.'²³⁴²³⁵

²³¹Calvin, 2:1:4.

²³²Ibid., 1:15:8.

²³³Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 52.

²³⁴Jeffrey Niehaus, "In the Wind of the Storm: Another Look at Genesis III 8," *Vetus Testamentum* 44 (1994):263-67.

²³⁵Douglas K. Stuart, "'The Cool of the Day' (Gen. 3:8) and 'the Way He Should Go' (Prov. 22:6)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:683 (July-September 2014):259.

"Though unlikely to be adopted by published Bibles anytime soon and not seen by all scholars as proving the presence of a storm theophany in the passage, Niehaus's translation of Genesis 3:8 remains the correct one. The verse is about God's appearance in the wind of a storm, not the cool of the day."²³⁶

"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."²³⁷

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). We might also add, sexually (between men and women) and maritally (between husbands and wives).

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

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

"There is nothing in Scripture to suggest that the woman was inferior to the man in any way or more susceptible to temptation than he was."²³⁸

²³⁶Ibid., p. 263.

²³⁷Wenham, p. 76.

²³⁸Susan Foh, *Women and the Word of God*, p. 63.

"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."²³⁹

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

"It is interesting to observe that when this sin is referred to throughout Scripture, it is not referred to as the sin of Eve—but rather as the sin of Adam! The phrase in verse 6, 'with her,' seems to suggest that Adam was at Eve's side when she was tempted by Satan. As God's theocratic administrator, and as the appointed head of the family, it was Adam's responsibility to safeguard Eve and to assure that she remained in submission to the command of God. But Adam failed in his God-given responsibility and permitted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit."²⁴⁰

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.²⁴¹ Too much aggressiveness in a woman, and too much passivity in a man, still are tendencies of the respective sexes. Death "passed unto all men" (Rom. 5:12) when Adam sinned—because *Adam*, not Eve, was the head of the human race under God's administration (cf. 3:18-23).²⁴²

Some commentators have interpreted eating the forbidden fruit as a euphemism for having sexual intercourse.²⁴³ They say that the original sin was a sexual sin. However, the text makes such an interpretation impossible. Eve sinned first (v. 6), she sinned alone (v. 6), and besides, God had previously approved sex (1:28).

"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."²⁴⁴

²³⁹Gerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 45.

²⁴⁰Pentecost, p. 37.

²⁴¹Hamilton, p. 191.

²⁴²See Jimmy A. Milliken, "The Origin of Death," *Mid-American Theological Journal* 7:2 (Winter 1983):17-22.

²⁴³E.g., E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 26.

²⁴⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 103.

The timeless lesson of these verses is, that victory over the temptation to violate God's good will, depends on a thorough knowledge of God's Word and an unwavering confidence in God's goodness. As Israel faced temptations to depart from God's revealed will, from the pagans she encountered, this record of the Fall would have provided a resource for remaining faithful, as it does for us today. Often these temptations attract because they promise superior blessing and fulfillment, even divinity. Therefore, knowing God's Word is extremely important (cf. Deut. 6:5-9, 13-25; Ps. 119:9-16). Satan tempted Jesus 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.

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* (God's grace = His divine favor, forgiveness, and righteousness freely granted). The sinners' responsibility was to confess their sins and to accept and trust in God's provision for them (cf. 1 John 1:9).

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."²⁴⁵

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 God having given him—what he now regarded to be—a bad gift! Contrast David's proper response in 2 Samuel 12:13.

²⁴⁵Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Anthropomorphism in Ancient Religions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:497 (January-March 1968):29.

The judgment of the guilty 3:14-21

As the result of man's disobedience to God, the creation suffered a curse and began to deteriorate. Evolution teaches that man is improving his condition through self-effort. The Bible teaches that man is destroying his condition through sin. Having been thrice blessed by God (1:22, 28; 2:3), the creation now experienced a triple curse (3:14, 17; 4:11).

"In the Bible, to curse means to invoke God's judgment on someone, usually for some particular offense."²⁴⁶

Nevertheless, God also began re-creation, with the promise of: the seed, the land, the dominion, and the *rest* for trusting in His powerful Word.

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 continuing headship by the man (v. 16). God also changed Adam and Eve's light workload, in Eden, to burdensome labor and inevitable sorrow, resulting from His curse on the earth (vv. 17-19). Finally, He promised certain physical death for Adam and all his 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.²⁴⁷ 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 . . ."²⁴⁸

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.²⁴⁹ Others take it figuratively as a reference to the resultant despised condition of the snake.²⁵⁰ Josephus wrote that God also deprived the serpent of speech at this time,²⁵¹ but there is no biblical support for this conclusion.

²⁴⁶Wenham, p. 78.

²⁴⁷J. T. Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b—3:24: A Synchronic Approach," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977):168.

²⁴⁸Mathews, p. 243.

²⁴⁹E.g., Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 1:1:4.

²⁵⁰E.g., Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 1:162; Kidner, p. 70; Mathews, p. 244.

²⁵¹Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 1:1:4.

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). Another explanation is that this is the language of appearance: snakes *appear* to eat dust now, since they glide along on their bellies.

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 be harmless (defeated; no longer a threat), after God lifts the curse on creation in the Millennium.

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

". . . the seed of the serpent refers to natural humanity whom he has led into rebellion against God. Humanity is now divided into two communities: the elect, who love God, and the reprobate, who love self (John 8:31-32, 44; 1 John 3:8). Each of the characters of Genesis will be either of the seed of the woman that reproduces her spiritual propensity, or of the seed of the Serpent that reproduces his unbelief."²⁵²

4. Mankind (through Christ) would eventually destroy the serpent, though the serpent would wound mankind (and Christ; 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).²⁵³ Most interpreters have recognized this verse as the first biblical promise of the provision of salvation (the *protoevangelium* or "first gospel").²⁵⁴ 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

²⁵²Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 93-94. Cf. p. 46.

²⁵³See John Sailhamer, "The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001):5-23.

²⁵⁴See 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.

more is at stake in this brief passage than the reader is at first aware of. A program is set forth. A plot is established that will take the author far beyond this or that snake and his 'seed.' It is what the snake and His [*sic* his] seed' represent that lies at the center of the author's focus. With that 'one' lies the 'enmity' that must be crushed."²⁵⁵

"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."²⁵⁶

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."²⁵⁷

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 even before the Fall, but Eve and her daughters would experience increased pain ("I will *greatly multiply* your pain"; emphasis added). The text does not say that God promised more conception as well as more pain.²⁵⁸ "Pain and childbirth" is probably another *hendiadys* in the Hebrew text meaning "pregnancy pain" or "sorrowful conception" (cf. 1:2; 4:12; 9:2; Ps. 9:2). Women's *joy* in conceiving and bearing children would be turned to sorrow by the pain involved in it.²⁵⁹
2. Women's desire would be for their husbands. There have been several different interpretations of what the woman's "desire" would be.
 - a. The phrase "your desire will be for your husband" means that a woman's desire would be subject to her husband's desire.

"Her desire, whatever it may be, will not be her own. She cannot do what she wishes, for her husband rules over her

²⁵⁵Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 55. See also Mathews, pp. 246-48.

²⁵⁶Elliott 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; and Wenham, pp. 80-81.

²⁵⁷Pamela J. Scalise, "The Significance of Curses and Blessings," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):59.

²⁵⁸Cf. Schaeffer, p. 93.

²⁵⁹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 11.

like a despot and whatever she wishes is subject to his will."²⁶⁰

- 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."²⁶¹

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

"The 'curse' here describes the beginning of the battle of the sexes. After the Fall, the husband no longer rules easily; he must fight for his headship. The woman's desire is to control her husband (to usurp his divinely appointed headship), and he must master her, if he can. Sin had corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband. And so the rule of love founded in paradise is replaced by struggle, tyranny, domination, and manipulation."²⁶²

- 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. . . ."²⁶³

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

²⁶⁰E. J. Young, *Genesis 3*, p. 127. Cf. John Calvin, *Genesis*, p. 172.

²⁶¹Leupold, 1:172. Cf. Gini Andrews, *Your Half of the Apple*, p. 51.

²⁶²Foh, p. 69. See also her article, "What is the Woman's Desire?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 37:3 (Spring 1975):376–383; Mathews, p. 251; and Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 94.

²⁶³Irving 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.

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 had not required 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."²⁶⁴

"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."²⁶⁵

"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)."²⁶⁶

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* (cf. Rom. 5:12-14).

"Genesis 3:19 does not attribute the cause of death to the original composition of the human body, so that man would ultimately have died anyway, but states merely one of the consequences of death: Since the human body was formed from the dust of the earth, it shall, upon death, be resolved to earth again."²⁶⁷

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. . . .

²⁶⁴von Rad, pp. 93-94.

²⁶⁵Ross, "Genesis," p. 33.

²⁶⁶Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 109.

²⁶⁷Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, p. 143.

"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."²⁶⁸

Additional effects on Adam and Eve 3:20-21

Adam and Eve accepted their judgment from God and did not rebel against it. We see this in Adam naming his wife "Eve": "The Mother of All the 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. "Eve" is related to the Hebrew verb that means "to live."

1. Note that before God sent Adam and Eve out into a new environment, He provided them with *clothing* ("garments of skin") 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.

". . . 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."²⁶⁹

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).²⁷⁰ "Like one of us" probably means like heavenly beings (God and the angels; cf. 1:26).²⁷¹

²⁶⁸Walvoord, p. 188.

²⁶⁹Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 25.

²⁷⁰Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 59.

²⁷¹Wenham, p. 85; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 95.

"Cherubim" in the Old Testament surround and symbolize God's presence. They are equivalent to God's "bodyguards," "standing guards," or "sentries." Ancient oriental iconography pictured them as human-headed winged lions guarding holy places.²⁷² Moses pictured them here blocking access to the tree of life with a "flaming sword." Evidently *eating* of "the tree of life" would have caused Adam and Eve to stop aging (cf. Rev. 22:2). Cherubim guarded the ark of the covenant later, just 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.²⁷³

As people moved east from the Garden, they settled in Shinar and built Babel (Gr. Babylon, 11:2). When Lot departed from Abraham he moved east to Sodom (13:11). When Abraham returned in victory from the battle against the eastern kings (led by Chedolaomer), he came back to the Promised Land, and the city of Salem ("Peace," 14:17-20). Thus God's *presence* continued to reside in the Garden (Promised Land?) in a localized sense, and movement *to the east*, from there, typically involved departing from Him.

"No matter how hard people try to do away with male dominion, agonizing labor, painful childbearing, and death, these evils will continue because sin is present. They are the fruits of sin."²⁷⁴

Rebellion against God results in suffering and death, but confession secures His gracious providence. 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 God's required way for covering sin, namely, the death of an innocent substitute. Consequently there is hope in the midst of tragedy.²⁷⁵

"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 [or *to abstain*]."²⁷⁶

²⁷²James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, pp. 159-60, plates 456, 458.

²⁷³Wenham, p. 86.

²⁷⁴Ross, "Genesis," p. 33.

²⁷⁵See 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.

²⁷⁶Hamilton, p. 211.

Thus Genesis 3 introduces us to the fact of human freedom, as well as reminding us of divine sovereignty.²⁷⁷

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 increasingly more wicked as time passed. Human self-assertion leads to 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. Sibling rivalry plagued each of the godly families in Genesis. Cain denied responsibility for his sin and objected to the severity of God's punishment. God graciously provided protection for Cain in response to his complaint. 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).²⁷⁸

- 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).

"Cain's sin, jealousy of his brother, is the replica of Adam's—jealousy of Yahweh's privilege."²⁷⁹

". . . 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."²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷See Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Narrative of the Fall," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (July-September 2004):259-73.

²⁷⁸Wenham, p. 99.

²⁷⁹Jacob, p. 284.

²⁸⁰Wenham, p. 100.

4:1-8

Was Eve thanking God for helping her "bear a son" ("Cain"),²⁸¹ or was she boasting that she had "created a man" ("Cain") as God had created a man (Adam, v. 1)?²⁸² The former alternative seems preferable (cf. v. 25). The name "Cain" sounds like the Hebrew word translated "I have acquired" and means "possession" or "acquisition," a portent of his own primary proclivity. His name is related to a Hebrew word meaning "craftsman" or "metalworker." Abel, from the Hebrew *hebel*, means "breath," "vapor," "exhalation," or "what ascends." As things turned out, his life was short, like a vapor. Perhaps his parents gave him this name after his death, in view of the comparative shortness of his life. "Abel" also means "meadow" elsewhere.

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.²⁸³

1. Some commentators believed Abel's *attitude* reveals his faith. Cain's improper attitude toward God is evident in verse 5.²⁸⁴
2. Others say Abel's faith is evident in his bringing the "best ('fat portions') . . . of his 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. . . .

"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

²⁸¹Mathews, p. 265; Wenham, pp. 101-2.

²⁸²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* . . . , pp. 111-12; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 96.

²⁸³See 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.

²⁸⁴Davis, p. 99; Pentecost, p. 41; et al.

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.'²⁸⁵

"Every unprejudiced reader of the Bible must feel that sacrifices constitute the centre of the Old Testament."²⁸⁶

Possibly Cain's *bad attitude* ("became very angry and his countenance fell") 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. 11:6), whereas Cain was simply discharging a duty."²⁸⁷

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

"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."²⁸⁸

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 Abel understood this, he may have learned it by divine revelation that Scripture did not record explicitly.²⁸⁹ Perhaps Cain and Abel learned that an animal sacrifice satisfied God, whereas a vegetable sacrifice did not, from the fact that the fig leaves that Adam and Eve used to cover their nakedness were not satisfactory, but an animal skin was (3:7, 21). They provided the fig leaves, but God provided the animal skins. Thus the contrast in the case of Cain and Abel may also be between what man provides (works) and what God provides (grace).

"Faith always presupposes a Divine revelation to which it is the response . . ."²⁹⁰

²⁸⁵Bruce K. Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48:2 (Fall 1986):368. Cf. idem, Genesis, p. 97; Keil and Delitzsch, 1:110; and Hamilton, p. 223.

²⁸⁶Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 106.

²⁸⁷Ross, "Genesis," p. 34.

²⁸⁸Mathews, p. 268. I prefer this view.

²⁸⁹Thomas, et al.

²⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 55.

"The general requisites of all sacrifices [in the Old Testament] were—that they should be brought of such things, in such place and manner, and through such mediatorial agency, as God had appointed."²⁹¹

"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."²⁹²

God graciously questioned Cain, as He had Adam and Eve (v. 6; cf. 3:9, 11), to elicit Cain's admission of sin *with a view toward repentance*, not simply to scold him. Had Cain corrected his attitude, he would not have proceeded to kill his brother. God gave him the opportunity and the encouragement to "do well." Adam reluctantly admitted his guilt, but Cain tried to cover it up by lying. Cain was "much more hardened than the first human pair."²⁹³ "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 it (cf. 3:16).

"The consequences of his reaction to God's correction are more far-reaching than the initial sin itself, for if he pursues 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."²⁹⁴

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). Jesus spoke of Cain's murder of Abel as a historical fact (Matt. 23:35).

"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 . . ."²⁹⁵

Later, 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."²⁹⁶

²⁹¹Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 109.

²⁹²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 112.

²⁹³von Rad, p. 106.

²⁹⁴Mathews, p. 270.

²⁹⁵Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible*, 1:147.

²⁹⁶Mathews, p. 269.

Violence (by Cain) followed disobedience (by Adam and Eve). Violence in a culture often reflects and results from rebellion against God and self-assertion.

4:9-16 As in chapter 3, God came investigating the crime with questions (vv. 9-10).²⁹⁷ 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 ("from Your face I will be hidden"), unable to enjoy his family's company and the fruitfulness of a settled agrarian life ("cursed from the ground . . . will no longer yield its strength"; vv. 11-12, 14). He would have to wander from place to place ("a wanderer"), seeking food ("a vagrant"), rather than living a sedentary life. This punishment was appropriate and just, since he had alienated himself from his brother and God by his horrible crime.

"Cain is not being condemned to a Bedouin-like existence; the terminology is too extreme to describe such a life-style. Rather it seems likely that the curse on Cain reflects the expulsion from the family that was the fate in tribal societies of those who murdered close relatives. . . . 'To be driven away from the land' (cf. v. 14) is to have all relationships, particularly with the family, broken. Moreover, it is to have one's relationship with the LORD broken . . ." ²⁹⁸

"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." ²⁹⁹

Cain's response was self-pity because of his *punishment*, rather than repentance for his *crime* and an expression of remorse over the extent of his iniquity.³⁰⁰ No one would be *his* "keeper" (cf. "Am I my brother's keeper?" v. 9).

²⁹⁷See P. A. Riemann, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" *Interpretation* 24 (1970):482-91.

²⁹⁸Wenham, p. 108.

²⁹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

³⁰⁰See Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 98; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 114.

Cain's sin resulted in his being "driven" out (v. 14; cf. 3:23). Note again that sin results in broken relationships and alienation, and alienation from God leads to *fear of other people* ("whoever finds me will kill me"; 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. One view is that it was partial paralysis, based on the meaning of the word used to translate "sign" in the Septuagint. An old Jewish interpretation understood it to be the word "Yahweh," and another viewed it as a long horn growing out of the middle of Cain's forehead. Some medieval paintings represent Cain with a horn on his head following this view.

Other ideas suggest that it was some other identifying mark on Cain, in view of parallels with other marks that identify and protect their bearers in Scripture (cf. Ezek. 9:4; Rev. 7:3; 13:16-18; 14:1).³⁰¹

Still other interpreters believe that the mark was a *verification* of God's promise to Cain. This last 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.³⁰²

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). Whatever it was, Cain's mark served to *protect* him, as well as to *remind* him and others of his banishment.

"Nod" (v. 16) is a wordplay on the Hebrew term for "vagabond" or "wandering," so the very name of the place, where he "settled" and "lived," also reminded Cain of his sentence (v. 12).

"The point is more theological than geographical; to be apart from the presence of the Lord is to be a vagabond in a 'vagabond-land.'"³⁰³

"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."³⁰⁴

³⁰¹Mathews, p. 278; Wenham, p. 109; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 99.

³⁰²See Bush, p. 104.

³⁰³*The Nelson . . .*, p. 12.

³⁰⁴Ross, "Genesis," p. 33.

Cain was a man who did not care to please God. Because he did not, God did not bless ("had no regard for") Cain, as He did ("had regard for") Abel, who was righteous, a *man of faith*. Cain's anger and jealousy over Abel's blessing brought disaster on himself. God has preserved his example to help us avoid it. Those who worship God must have as their goal *to please Him*, rather than letting envy and hatred ruin their lives (cf. Col. 1:10).

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."³⁰⁵

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."³⁰⁶

The "city" that Cain built (v. 17) must not have been very large, though reference to it suggests that the population at this time was increasing rapidly. "Lamech" (v. 19) was the first *bigamist*. He deliberately subverted God's will that marriage should consist of *only one man and one woman* (2:24). "Bigamy" (being married to two spouses at the same time) was common in the ancient Near East, but it was never God's desire (cf. Matt. 19:4-5). God permitted it, however, as He did many other customs of which He disapproved (e.g., divorce, marrying concubines, polygamy, etc.). That is, He allowed people who practiced them to continue to live.

³⁰⁵R. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, p. 155.

³⁰⁶Gary Parker, *Creation Facts of Life*, p. 98. This is an excellent book that deals with the evidence of creation, Darwin and biologic change, and the fossil evidence. See also Ham, et al., pp. 17, 177-85.

"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."³⁰⁷

"Cain's family is a microcosm: its pattern of technical prowess and moral failure is that of humanity."³⁰⁸

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'être* [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."³⁰⁹

This is the first occurrence of "polygamy" (having more than one wife at the same time) in Genesis. We shall find several cases of it throughout the Old Testament. People practiced it widely in the ancient Near East, but it was contrary to the will of God (2:24). Besides indulging the flesh, polygamy was an attempt to ensure the survival of the family by providing male successors.³¹⁰ The presence of polygamy in Lamech's generation shows how sin escalated in the marriage relationship following the Fall.

The reference to forging (lit. "sharpening"; also forming, shaping) "iron" implements (v. 22) appears anachronistic since, as far as we know, the smelting of iron was not common until the Iron Age, in the second millennium B.C. Perhaps this is a reference to the cold forging of meteoric iron, which was common earlier.³¹¹ Later workers with iron could look back on Lamech as the father of metallurgy.

We could paraphrase the vengeance or retaliation idea in Lamech's mind, as expressed in verses 23-24, more clearly as follows: "If I am threatened again, I will retaliate again, much more forcefully than God retaliated for Cain." God threatened *His* retaliation and vengeance against anyone who retaliated against Cain for being a murderer: ". . . whoever

³⁰⁷Hamilton, p. 238. Cf. Deut. 21:15-17.

³⁰⁸Kidner, p. 78.

³⁰⁹Ibid., p. 36.

³¹⁰For a good, brief introduction to polygamy, see M. Stephen Davis, "Polygamy in the Ancient World," *Biblical Illustrator* 14:1 (Fall 1987):34-36.

³¹¹*The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Mining and Metals," by A. Stuart. See also Mathews, p. 287; and Hamilton, p. 239.

kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold" (v. 15). Lamech may have been claiming that he had killed in self-defense. Nevertheless he was boasting, and shows himself thereby to be more vengeful in his self-defensive threat than even God Himself (cf. "Vengeance is Mine, . . . I will repay"; Deut. 32:35; Exod. 21:25)! The seven generations from Adam through Cain and Seth, ungodly Lamech (vv. 19-24) and godly Enoch (5:24), stand in sharp contrast to each other. The former man (Lamech) inflicts death, and the latter (Enoch) does not die. Some scholars have called Lamech's poem the "Song of the Sword." Lamech thought himself invincible with his newly acquired weapons.

"Both Cain's antediluvian lineage and the postdiluvian Babel cautioned later Israel that cities founded upon arrogance resulted in violence and ultimately destruction."³¹²

The family of Seth 4:25-26

Verse 25 recalls verse 1 of this chapter, and signals the conclusion of this section of narrative. Seth's name, from the Hebrew verb translated "granted," and meaning "to set" or "to place," expresses Eve's faith that God would continue to provide seed despite death.³¹³

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," in the Pentateuch, usually refers to *proclamation* (preaching) rather than prayer.³¹⁴ Here it probably refers to the beginning of public worship of Yahweh.

"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."³¹⁵

Chapter 4 also teaches that it is important, for the righteous, to preserve the knowledge of God when they live in an ungodly society. The Israelites needed this encouragement as they anticipated entering the Promised Land, as we do today. Jesus taught His disciples the same lesson (Matt. 5:14-15).

³¹²Mathews, pp. 282-83.

³¹³Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 101.

³¹⁴Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 169.

³¹⁵Wenham, p. 116.

C. WHAT BECAME OF ADAM 5:1—6:8

The story of creation is an introduction to Genesis. The first *toledot* section explains what became of the creation. In this second *toledot* section, we learn what happened to Adam. The primary purpose of this 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."³¹⁶

"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."³¹⁷

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. One writer argued that the ages of these patriarchs were inflated to glorify them.³¹⁸ I think not, as this would seemingly undermine the trustworthiness of Scripture.

³¹⁶Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 105. See also David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, pp. 249-50; M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, pp. 77-82.

³¹⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 109.

³¹⁸R. 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.

"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."³¹⁹

2. This genealogy also demonstrates the veracity of God's (spoken) word when He said that people would die as a result of sin (cf. 2:17). Note the recurrence of the phrase "and he died" (vv. 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, and 31).
3. The genealogy contrasts the progress of the godly line of Seth culminating in "Enoch" (lit. "Dedicated One"), who walked with God and experienced "translation" (i.e., instant transformation and transport into heaven, without dying; 5:6-24; cf. 3:8; 6:8), with the development of the ungodly line of Cain. Cain's branch of the human race culminated in Lamech, who was a brutal bigamist (4:16-24).

"The author's return to the theme of God's 'blessing' man (cf. v. 2) is also a part of his overall scheme to cast God's purposes for man in terms that will recall a father's care for his children. Throughout the remainder of the Book of Genesis, a recurring theme is that of 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)."³²⁰

Enoch's "walk[ing] with God" must have stimulated this sign that appeared on a church marquee: "Exercise daily. Walk with God."

Some commentators have seen evidence in the text that this genealogy is not complete.³²¹

1. The word "father" can just as accurately be translated "ancestor" (v. 3, et al.). It does not require a literal father-son sequence.³²²

³¹⁹Mathews, p. 298.

³²⁰Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 70-71.

³²¹E.g., Mathews, p. 305.

³²²See Kenneth Kitchen, *The Bible In Its World*, p. 33.

2. The fact that Lamech, the sixth name in Cain's list (4:16-24), corresponds to Enoch, the sixth name in Seth's list (5:6-24), is *suggestive*: It indicates that God wanted to point out the contrast between the generations of these two sons of Adam. One was *ungodly* and the other *godly*. This purpose seems to some writers to be more dominant, than that God wanted simply to preserve a complete record of *all* the generations between Adam and Noah. Lamech and Enoch were each the seventh generation, as recorded in this list, from Adam (cf. Jude 14). Matthew 1:1-17 contains a similar genealogy, in which 14 men from each of three historical periods appear, and *it* is not 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.³²³

But 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.³²⁴ 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 in chapter 5's genealogy.³²⁵

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

"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.

³²³See 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.

³²⁴See J. Paul Tanner, "Old Testament Chronology and Its Implications for the Creation and Flood Accounts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:65 (January-March 2015):24-44; and Appendix 2 at the end of these notes: Chronology of Genesis 5 & 11.

³²⁵See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:120-27. Wenham, pp. 130-34, wrote an excursus on the ages of the antediluvians that is one of the best discussions of this issue that I have found.

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."³²⁶

Assuming closed (or "tight") genealogies in chapters 5 and 11, J. Paul Tanner calculated the Creation as having occurred about 4200 B.C., and the Flood about 2550 B.C.³²⁷

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; Eph. 4:1).

"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.'"³²⁸

"'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."³²⁹

"The double repetition of the phrase 'walked with God' indicates Enoch was outstanding in this pious family."³³⁰

Repetition usually reinforces and emphasizes in Scripture. 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.³³¹ God will snatch some away (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:17),

³²⁶Robert B. Robinson, "Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (October 1986):600-601. See also Gavin Ortlund, "Image of Adam, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57:4 (December 2014):673-88.

³²⁷Tanner, p. 44.

³²⁸Sailhamer, *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 also Timothy J. Cole, "Enoch, a Man Who Walked with God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:591 (July-September 1991):288-97.

³²⁹Mathews, p. 313. Cf. 3:8; 6:9.

³³⁰Wenham, p. 127.

³³¹For 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.

like Enoch, but most have to endure physical death, though not necessarily spiritual death.

"The finality of death caused by sin, and so powerfully demonstrated in the genealogy of Genesis, is in fact not so final. Man was not born to die; he was born to live, and that life comes by walking with God. . . . Walking with God is the key to the chains of the curse."³³²

"Within the time-scale of Genesis, this chapter [5] covers the longest period in world history."³³³

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."³³⁴

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* (demons) who married women.³³⁵
Arguments in favor of this view follow, with responses:
 - a. The term "sons of God," as it occurs here in the 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).

³³²Cole, p. 294.

³³³Wenham, p. 145.

³³⁴Whybray, p. 45. Josephus cited Berosus, a Chaldean historian, as one such writer, in *Against Apion*, 1:19.

³³⁵*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, 1:245-48; R. S. Hendel, "When the Sons of God Cavorted with the Daughters of Men," *Bible Review* 3:2 (Summer 1987):8-13, 37; Merrill, p. 23; Wenham, pp. 140, 146; *The Nelson* . . . , p. 15; et al.

- 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.
 - 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. I prefer this view. Arguments in favor of this view follow, with responses:
- a. The Old Testament often refers to *the godly* as "God's sons" (e.g., Exod. 4:22). 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 ungodly dynastic rulers who married women.³³⁶ "Fallen angels" (demons) may have indwelt, or at least controlled, *them*.³³⁷ 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" or "sons" 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. One writer expressed his frustration as follows:

³³⁶Meredith G. Klein, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4," *Westminster Theological Journal* 24 (1962):187-204; John Skinner, *Genesis*; Kitchen, "The Old . . .," p. 4; et al. See also Watson E. Mills, "Sons of God: The Roman View," *Biblical Illustrator* (Fall 1983):37-39.

³³⁷Ross, "Genesis," p. 36; Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 116-17.

"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."³³⁸

Context is very important in any interpretive problem, and I believe it argues for view 2 in this case.³³⁹ If so, the purpose of this segment appears to be to document the degradation of even the godly, thus justifying the flood.

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

6:3 The "120 years" are evidently the number of years that God would give humankind before the Flood.³⁴⁰ They probably do not indicate a reduction in the normal human lifespan to 120 years.³⁴¹

"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."³⁴²

"The attempt by man to become more than he is results in his becoming less."³⁴³

6:4 The "Nephilim" were on the earth both before and after the marriages of the "sons of God" with the "daughters of men." They were literally "fallen ones" or "tyrants." They were described as "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.

³³⁸Albertus Pieters, *Notes on Genesis*, p. 116.

³³⁹See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:131-34. Many conservative interpreters hold this view. See Wolf, p. 99.

³⁴⁰Keil and Delitzsch, 1:136.

³⁴¹However Mathews, p. 335; Westermann, p. 376; Wenham, pp. 142, 146-47; et al. defended the shortening of life view.

³⁴²Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 72.

³⁴³L. 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.

6:5 Men's and women's actions were *very wicked*, and their thoughts and affections ("every intent of the thoughts of his heart"; their mind-set, attitudes, and motives) were completely ("continually") "evil" by this time (cf. vv. 11-12; Rom. 1:18-32).

"Near the turn of the 19th century F. W. Farrar wrote a book entitled *Seekers After God*. The book was a popular seller and was in considerable demand. A certain western bookseller had a number of requests for the volume but had no copies available. He sent a telegram to the dealers in New York requesting them to ship him a number of the books. After awhile a telegram came back which read, 'No seekers after God in New York. Try Philadelphia.'"³⁴⁴

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 were destroying themselves in sin. He was sorry over what His special creation had become. This is an *anthropopathism*: Moses was describing the Lord as having human emotions (cf. 9:15, 16).

"God is no robot. We know him as a personal, living God, not a static principle, who while having transcendent purposes to be sure also engages intimately with his creation. Our God is incomparably affected by, even pained by, the sinner's rebellion. Acknowledging the passibility (emotions) of God does not diminish the immutability 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)."³⁴⁵

6:8 Noah was the one exception to universal godlessness. "Noah" may mean "grieved" (the Hebrew *niphal* form) or "comfort" (the *piel* form). "Favor" equals "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 wordplay in the Hebrew text (an *anagram*). The same consonants of Noah's name (*nh*) in the reverse order mean "grace" (*hn*).

All of God's people can identify with "Noah": they have all been recipients of God's grace. It is only by God's "grace" that we can escape His judgment on the wicked.

³⁴⁴D. Edmond Hiebert, *Working with God: Scriptural Studies in Intercession*, pp. 100–101.

³⁴⁵Mathews, p. 344.

"Genesis is flatly contradicting the humanistic optimism of Mesopotamia: humanity's situation in its view is hopeless without divine mercy."³⁴⁶

This section—together with the next—shows that pagan idolatry and immorality *pain* God and incur His judgment, and that man can only escape by His provision of salvation.

D. WHAT BECAME OF NOAH 6:9—9:29

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

"Noah's experience presents decisively the author's assertion that the Lord judges human sin but provides a means for perpetuating the creation blessing (1:26-28) and the salvation hope for an elect seed (3:15). The recurring theme of blessing, threatened by sin but preserved by divine mercy, is found in the two narratives that make up the Noah *toledot*: the flood story (6:9—9:17) and the account of the patriarch's drunkenness (9:20-27). The former is worldwide in scope, and the latter is its microcosm. A genealogical note binds the two (9:18-19), and another concludes it (9:28-29). . . .

"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."³⁴⁷

1. The Flood 6:9—8:22

The "chiastic" (palistrophic, crossing) structure of this section shows that Moses intended to emphasize *God's grace to Noah*, which occupies the central part of the story.

"One mark of the coherence of the flood narrative is to be found in its literary structure. The tale is cast in the form of an extended palistrophe, that is a structure that turns back on itself. In a palistrophe the first item matches the final item, the second item matches the penultimate 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.'

³⁴⁶Wenham, p. xlvi.

³⁴⁷Mathews, pp. 349-50.

"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."³⁴⁸

The following diagram illustrates this palistrophe (chiasm) more simply:

"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)."³⁴⁹

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

6:9-12 This is the first time the important words "righteous" and "blameless" appear in the Bible.

"The same explanation for Enoch's rescue from death ('he walked with God') is made the basis for Noah's rescue from death in the Flood: 'he walked with God' (6:9). Thus in the story of Noah and the Flood, the author is able to repeat the lesson of Enoch: life comes through 'walking with God.'"³⁵⁰

"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;

³⁴⁸Gordon 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.

³⁴⁹Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 191. See also the charts in Mathews, p. 354; and Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 125.

³⁵⁰Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 119.

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."³⁵¹

"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."³⁵²

"Whereas God has blessed the human family with the power of procreation to fill the earth (1:28; 9:1), these culprits have 'filled the earth' by procreating 'violence' (cf. v. 13; Ezek 8:17; 28:16)."³⁵³

6:13-16 Notice again that "the earth" (atmosphere, planet surface, oceans, vegetation, ecology) and *nature* (virtually all plant and animal life on earth; ecological balance; climate and weather patterns; volcanoes; earthquakes) had to 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." Much 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)."³⁵⁴

The ark was about 450 feet long (1 1/2 American football fields), 75 feet wide (7 standard parking spaces), and 45 feet high (a typical four-story building). It had three decks, and over 100,000 square feet of deck space. There were over 1 million cubic feet of space in it. This is a volume capacity of approximately 860 railroad boxcars. It had a floating capacity (its buoyancy; the total weight it could float) of almost 14,000 gross tons.³⁵⁵

³⁵¹Mathews, 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.

³⁵²Thomas, p. 71.

³⁵³Mathews, p. 359.

³⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 363.

³⁵⁵See "Noah's Flood: Washing Away Millions of Years" DVD featuring Dr. Terry Mortenson.

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

6:17-21 This is the first occurrence of the important word "covenant" (Heb. *berith*) in the Old Testament (v. 18). Details of this covenant follow in 9:9. There were two basic kinds of covenants in the ancient Near East.³⁵⁶

1. The *parity* covenant was one that equals (between peers) 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 (e.g., a king) made with an inferior (e.g., a 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.

"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."³⁵⁷

6:22 We can see Noah's faith (Heb. 11:7) in his complete obedience to God ("Noah did . . . according to all that God had commanded him"; cf. 7:5, 9, 16; 8:16-18)—even though he faced many obstacles. In this, he was similar to Abraham (cf. 12:4; 22:3).

"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

³⁵⁶G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment*, pp. 153–154.

³⁵⁷Mathews, p. 368.

about their tasks of obedience to God's will. They obeyed God with 'all their hearts.'"³⁵⁸

"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."³⁵⁹

7:1-10 God, in His *grace*, invited Noah to enter the ark with his family (v. 1; cf. 8:15). God took the initiative, as He later did in calling Abram (cf. 12:1). This is the first occurrence of the offer "Come" in the Bible (v. 1, NET). 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."³⁶⁰

"Sinful men do not *deserve* to live on God's earth. This is the basic message of the Genesis Flood."³⁶¹

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 these distinctions varied from country to country. In the Mosaic Law, God further distinguished between foods. Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul taught that now, since the Church Age, 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. The flood was *universal*, in that it covered the entire earth. Here is a summary of the evidence that supports this view.

³⁵⁸Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 125.

³⁵⁹Thomas, p. 74.

³⁶⁰Mathews, p. 371.

³⁶¹John C. Whitcomb, *Esther: The Triumph of God's Sovereignty*, p. 21.

- 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."³⁶²

2. The flood was *local*, and covered only part of the earth. The evidence is as follows:
 - a. The main arguments rest on modern geology, and the improbability of a universal flood in view of the consequential 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, ever since the modern science of geology has called into question the credibility of the text.

"The principle concern of those advocating a local flood is to escape the geological implications of a universal flood."³⁶³

"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."³⁶⁴

³⁶²Davis, p. 124. See Whitcomb and Morris; Boice, 1:278-88; Ariel A. Roth, "Evidences for a worldwide flood," *Ministry* (May 1984), pp. 12-14; Donald Patten, "The Biblical Flood: A Geographical Perspective," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:509 (January-March 1971):36-49; and Wolf, pp. 101-6.

³⁶³Davis, p. 124. See Ramm, pp. 229-40; and Kidner; et al.; who advocated a local flood.

³⁶⁴John R. Woodmorappe, "A Diluviological Treatise on the Stratigraphic Separation of Fossils," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* (December 1983):135.

Basically, this controversy, like that involving the Creation account, involves presuppositions about the credibility of Scripture or science, and the possibility of supernatural occurrences. The scientific community seems to be more open to catastrophism of some kind than it used to be.³⁶⁵

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.³⁶⁶ 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."³⁶⁷

"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 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."³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵See 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.

³⁶⁶See my comments on 2:5-6.

³⁶⁷Ham, et al., p. 15. Cf. also pp. 117-29 for further discussion.

³⁶⁸Mathews, pp. 381-82.

The Lord Jesus affirmed the historicity of the "days of Noah" when He likened them to the end days (Matt. 24:37; Luke 17:26, 27). Peter also used the story of Noah as an illustration of what will happen in the end days (1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:5, 6).

The aftermath of the Flood ch. 8

8:1-5 When Moses wrote that "God remembered" someone (v. 1), in this case "Noah," he meant that God extended mercy to him or her by delivering that person from death or destruction (here; cf. 19:29) or from barrenness (30:22).³⁶⁹ God's rescue of Noah foreshadows His deliverance of Israel in the Exodus (cf. 8:13-14 and Exod. 2:24; 14:21).³⁷⁰

"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."³⁷¹

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.³⁷²

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."³⁷³

³⁶⁹Hamilton, p. 299.

³⁷⁰Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* . . . , p. 127; idem, "Genesis," p. 89.

³⁷¹Mathews, pp. 385-86.

³⁷²For a history of the evidence that Noah's ark is still on Mt. Ararat, see Boice, 1:263-65. See also Tim LaHaye and John Morris, *The Ark on Mt. Ararat*, or Violet Cummings, *Has Anybody Really Seen Noah's Ark?* Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . . , 1:3:5; 20:2:2

³⁷³Keil and Delitzsch, 1:149.

Doves (v. 8), which are light-colored, clean animals (Lev. 1:14; 12:6; et al.), in contrast to dark-colored, 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."³⁷⁴

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

"Both Noah and Abraham represent new beginnings in the course of events recorded in Genesis. Both are marked by God's promise of blessing and his gift of the covenant."³⁷⁵

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, such as *capital punishment*. 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 presently avenge murder—individually—but to do so *as a corporate group*, and practice "capital punishment," in order to safeguard the sanctity of human life. Human life is a gift from God that people should not dispose of except as God 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, mankind failed to rule his fellow man 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 specific test of human obedience, when God called Abraham to be His instrument of blessing to the whole world (12:2). Nevertheless mankind's responsibility for government did not end then, but will continue until Christ sets up His kingdom on the earth.

³⁷⁴Ibid.

³⁷⁵Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 91.

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

"To sacrifice seems as 'natural' to man as to pray; the one indicates what he feels about himself, the other what he feels about God. The one means a felt need of propitiation; the other a felt sense of dependence."³⁷⁶

God will again judge the wicked catastrophically, and begin a new era of existence with faithful believers: at the Second Coming and the Millennium.

The non-biblical stories of the Flood are undoubtedly perversions of the true account that God preserved in Scripture.³⁷⁷ God may have revealed the true account directly to Moses, or He may have preserved a true oral or written account that Moses used as his source of this information. Moses may have written the Genesis account, under divine inspiration, to correct the Mesopotamian versions (the maximalist view), or both the biblical and Mesopotamian accounts may go back to a common tradition (the minimalist view).³⁷⁸

"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."³⁷⁹

2. The Noahic Covenant 9:1-17

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

³⁷⁶Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 107.

³⁷⁷See Finegan, pp. 27-36, for discussion of these.

³⁷⁸For a chart that compares the biblical account of the Flood with four other ancient Near Eastern accounts of it, see Appendix 3 at the end of these notes.

³⁷⁹Mathews, p. 397.

9:17 possesses lexical and thematic connections with the ratification of the Sinai covenant by Moses and the elders (Exod 24:4-18)."³⁸⁰

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).³⁸¹ As with Adam, He also gave them *dominion* over the animals, and permission to eat any animal or "moving thing" for food, with only one prohibition, the animal's *blood* (cf. 1:26, 28-29; 2:16-17).

"The fear of you" and "the terror of you" express the same idea (v. 2). Evidently at this point animals began to have a greater fear of human beings than they had previously (cf. 1:28).

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 ("into your hand they are given").

"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."³⁸²

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

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.³⁸³

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

³⁸⁰Ibid., 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.

³⁸¹See Bernhard W. Anderson, "Creation and Ecology," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 4:1 (January 1983):14-30; and Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 155-56.

³⁸²Mathews, p. 401.

³⁸³See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 22-64; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 23-59.

image. This is one reason, therefore, that murder is so serious. A person extinguishes a revelation of God—which God takes very personally (cf. Abel's blood "crying out to [God] from the ground")—when he or she murders someone.³⁸⁴ Years 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, so it is still in force. Before the Flood, the lack of capital punishment led to bloody vendettas (cf. ch. 4).

"This command laid the foundation for all civil government."³⁸⁵

"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."³⁸⁶

"I sometimes feel that often the hue and cry against capital punishment today does not so much rest upon humanitarian interest or even an interest in justice, but rather in a failure to understand that man is unique. The simple fact is that Genesis 9:6 is a sociological statement: The reason that the punishment for murder can be so severe is that man, being created in the image of God, has a particular value—not just a theoretical value at some time before the Fall, but such a value yet today."³⁸⁷

Often, today, people who believe in capital punishment argue *for* it on the basis of passages that commanded the Israelites to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc. (Exod. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21; cf. Num. 35:33). However, that was Mosaic legislation, and Christ ended the Law when He died on the cross (cf. Rom. 10:4; et al.). A better basis for capital punishment is this Noahic legislation.

³⁸⁴See 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.

³⁸⁵Keil and Delitzsch, 1:153. See Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 157-58.

³⁸⁶Pentecost, p. 46.

³⁸⁷Schaeffer, pp. 50-51.

Sometimes those who argue *against* capital punishment, today, appeal to Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil . . ." (Matt. 5:38-39). Jesus was not cancelling God's command to execute murderers when He said this, but was teaching self-restraint and non-retaliation in interpersonal conflicts, as is clear from the context.

Others sometimes appeal to Jesus' words to the woman taken in adultery: "Neither do I condemn you; go your way; from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). They believe that Jesus was refusing to recommend the death penalty for a person who had committed a capital offense under Israel's law, because He disapproved of capital punishment. Besides the fact that the inspiration of this passage is highly disputed, Jesus, as the Judge of all mankind, had every right to waive or postpone this woman's judgment.

Jesus, on the other hand, also said, in the Sermon on the Mount, "For in the way you judge [deal with people], you will be judged [dealt with], and by your standard of measure, it shall be measured to you" (Matt. 7:2). And, "All those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

The Apostle Paul also taught Christians to submit to the government: that "bear[s] the sword" and is "an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil" (Rom. 13:4). These statements affirm judgment "in kind" for offenders.

9:8-17

The Noahic Covenant was a *suzerainty* treaty that God made with humankind through Noah.³⁸⁸ In it, He promised to "never again . . . destroy all flesh" with a "flood [of] water" (v. 11). The sign God appointed to remind people of this promise, and to guarantee its veracity, was the *rainbow* ("bow"; v. 12-15; cf. 6:12). There may have been rainbows before this pronouncement, but now God attached significance to the rainbow.

In later years, God gave other signs in connection with other covenants: physical circumcision with the Abrahamic Covenant, Sabbath observance with the Mosaic Covenant, and the Lord's Supper with the New Covenant.

"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

³⁸⁸See note on 6:18.

of peace between both, and, spanning the horizon, it points to the all-embracing universality of the Divine mercy."³⁸⁹

"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."³⁹⁰

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: God was making His promise—to all living creatures for all time going forward—very *personal*. Finally, this covenant is unconditional (v. 9), universal (v. 11), and everlasting (v. 12).³⁹¹

"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."³⁹²

"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."³⁹³

³⁸⁹Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, 1:289-90.

³⁹⁰Ross, "Genesis," p. 40.

³⁹¹See Thomas, pp. 89-93.

³⁹²Mathews, p. 62.

³⁹³Walvoord, pp. 188-89.

The elements of the Noahic Covenant are the following: (1) God held man responsible for protecting the sanctity of human life by orderly governmental rule, even specifying the use of capital punishment (9:5-6; cf. Rom. 13:1-7). (2) 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). (3) God now permitted people to eat animal flesh, evidently for the first time (9:3-4). (4) God announced that Canaan's descendants would be servants to their 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)."³⁹⁴

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 ("let Canaan be his [Shem's and Japheth's] servant"), because Ham (Canaan's father) showed disrespect toward Noah, whereas the LORD blessed Shem and Japheth, because they showed regard for their father's vulnerable condition ("covered their father's nakedness").

"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."³⁹⁵

9:18-24 Evidently Noah became so "drunk" that he took off all his clothes, and then passed out naked ("uncovered") in his tent. There is no explicit indication that Ham disrobed his father or committed some homosexual act.³⁹⁶ However, because the expression "to see one's nakedness" is sometimes used of sexual intercourse, it is possible that some form of sexual immorality was involved.³⁹⁷ One writer argued that Ham's sin was

³⁹⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 93.

³⁹⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 206.

³⁹⁶See Mathews, pp. 417, 419.

³⁹⁷Wolf, pp. 106-7.

that he failed to cover his father's nakedness.³⁹⁸ I think that probably some sexual sin was committed.

Noah's shame was not that he drank some wine, but that he drank to excess and thereby lost self-control, which 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 stumblingblock for Adam and Eve had also been "the fruit of the vine," only in their case, to be precise, it was "a fruit from a tree."

"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)."³⁹⁹

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 disrespectful, inappropriate, carnal and 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."⁴⁰⁰

"The sons of Noah are here shown to belong to two groups of humankind, those who like Adam and Eve hide the shame of their nakedness and those who like Ham, or rather the Canaanites, have no sense of their shame before God. The one group, the line of Shem, will be blessed (9:26); but the other, the Canaanites (not the Hamites), can only be cursed (9:25)."⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸Nicholas Odhiambo, "The Nature of Ham's Sin," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:678 (April-June 2013):154-65.

³⁹⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* . . . , p. 120. See also Mathews, p. 418.

⁴⁰⁰Allen P. Ross, "The Curse of Canaan," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:547 (July-September 1980):230.

⁴⁰¹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch* . . . , p. 130.

"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."⁴⁰²

Ham's action may have also involved an attempt to take the leadership of the family from Noah.⁴⁰³ Shem and Japheth's act of "cover[ing]" 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 human 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 particular grandson's descendants (cf. Gen. 49; Deut. 33; et al.).

"For his breach of the family, his [Ham's] own family would falter."⁴⁰⁴

The Canaanites became known for their shameless depravity in sexual matters.⁴⁰⁵ When Joshua invaded their land, he proved to be God's instrument of punishment for the Canaanites. Moses' mention of Noah's curse on Canaan would have encouraged his original Israelite readers, by reminding them that the people who occupied the land that they were about to enter were cursed. Likewise, his mention of Noah's blessing of Shem, the ancestor of Abram and the Israelites, would have encouraged them (v. 26).

"With the defeat of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar in 572 B.C. the Canaanites/Phoenicians ceased to be of importance in biblical history."⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰²Mathews, p. 421.

⁴⁰³See Jordan, pp. 47-52.

⁴⁰⁴Kidner, p. 104.

⁴⁰⁵See Charles Pfeiffer, *Ras Shamra and the Bible*.

⁴⁰⁶*The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, 1975 ed., s.v. "Canaan, Canaanite," by A. K. Helmbold, 1:297. See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Canaan, Canaanites," by Kenneth A. Kitchen; and *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 1957 ed., s.v. "Canaan, Canaanites," by Merrill F. Unger.

"In dealing with the Canaanites and their religious ideas we must never forget that Canaanites and Phoenicians were one people, so far as language and cultural tradition went."⁴⁰⁷

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 *only his branch* of the family, are the subject of this prophecy, not *Ham* and *all his descendants*. The curse on Canaan was a prophecy of what God would do to Canaan's branch of the human family, because the sinful attitude and act of Ham would eventually come to "full flower" *in his son Canaan*. Noah, as a prophet, looked down the corridors of time, with God's help, and saw what would happen. The Canaanites are now extinct.

"There are no grounds in our passage for an ethnic reading of the 'curse' as some have done, supposing that some peoples are inferior to others. Here Genesis looks only to the social and religious life of Israel's ancient rival Canaan, whose immorality defiled their land and threatened Israel's religious fidelity (cf. Lev 18:28; Josh 23). It was not an issue of ethnicity but of the wicked practices that characterized Canaanite culture."⁴⁰⁸

The general lesson of the passage is that God blesses those who behave righteously, but curses those who abandon moral restraint. In view of what studies on the effects of viewing pornography have taught us, it should be no surprise that the root of the depraved Canaanite culture was looking at someone's nakedness. We need to be very careful about viewing nudity. It can lead to an addiction that results in complete corruption, and finally ends in divine judgment.

"Instructively, the first three heroes of faith listed in Hebrews are from Genesis 4—6: Abel, Enoch, and Noah. All believed God, but their destinies were significantly different. Abel believed God and died. Enoch believed God and did not die. Noah believed God, and everyone else died in the Flood; eventually he died a natural death at the good old age of 950 years. We cannot dictate where faith will lead. The human tendency is to see only Enoch as the example of faith, but Abel is also given as our example. What all three have in common is that they walked by faith and pleased God. That faith is an example to us."⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 68.

⁴⁰⁸Mathews, 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.

⁴⁰⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 155.

The husband of a former student told me that his ancestors many generations back were mainly believers. Several generations ago, 11 of 12 children became Christians. The head of his branch of the family was the twelfth child, the only unbeliever in that generation of the family. As the years passed, those 11 believing children produced many other Christian descendants who became preachers, teachers, pastors, doctors, missionaries, and other godly people who became a blessing to multitudes of people. His unbelieving ancestor produced several alcoholics, criminals, and blights on society. My student's husband was the first person in five generations to become a Christian from that branch of his family. The family tree of Jonathan Edwards, like the "godly branch" of the family just described, also produced much good fruit.

There are many similarities between the Creation story and the Flood story.⁴¹⁰

	THE FIRST BEGINNING: ADAM AND EVE	THE SECOND BEGINNING: NOAH AND HIS FAMILY
God's Action	God created Adam and Eve from the dust (2:7).	God saved Noah and his family from destruction (7:23).
God's Provision	God planted the Garden and gave Adam and Eve plants to eat (1:29-31; 2:8).	God saved animal species along with Noah and gave Noah and his family animals for food (6:17-22).
God's Blessing	Be fruitful and multiply; have dominion over all living things (1:28).	Be fruitful and multiply; all living things will be filled with fear and dread of you (9:1, 2).
God's Covenant	[You have great freedom, but if you disobey Me you will die (2:17).]	Never again will God destroy the earth with a flood; He will always provide the annual seasons (8:21, 22; 9:11).
God's Prohibition	Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:16).	Do not shed the blood of any person [without divine authorization] (9:5, 6).
God's Warning	Those who eat of it will die (2:17).	Of those who shed blood God will demand a reckoning (9:5).
God's Evaluation	It is very good (1:31).	Humanity's heart is evil (8:21).

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

This section gives in some detail the distribution of Noah's descendants over the earth after the Flood (cf. 9:18-19). Part of God's plan to bring blessing to humankind involved dividing the human race by languages, territories, and nations.

This fourth *toledot* section (10:1—11:9) brings the inspired record of primeval 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

⁴¹⁰The following chart is adapted from *The Nelson . . .*, p. 18.

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."⁴¹¹

"The Tower of Babel incident (11:1-9), though following the table in the present literary arrangement, actually precedes chronologically the dispersal of the nations. This interspersal of narrative (11:1-9) separates the two genealogies of Shem (10:21-31; 11:10-26), paving the way for the particular linkage between the Terah (Abraham) clan and the Shemite lineage (11:27). The story of the tower also looks ahead by anticipating the role that Abram (12:1-3) will play in restoring the blessing to the dispersed nations."⁴¹²

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). Like 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."⁴¹³

"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

⁴¹¹Mathews, p. 427.

⁴¹²Ibid., p. 428.

⁴¹³Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, p. 76. See pages 76-79 for discussion of each name in chapter 10.

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."⁴¹⁴

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 choice 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 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.⁴¹⁵ Jacob's family also comprised 70 people (46:27), which may indicate that Moses viewed Israel as a *microcosm* of humanity, as he presented it here. God set the "microcosm" (Israel) apart to bless the "macrocosm" (all of humanity).

Japheth's descendants (vv. 2-5) settled north, east, and west of Ararat.⁴¹⁶ 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 now 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.⁴¹⁷

"The Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian dialects constitute the older East Semitic branch of this family, while Hebrew, Aramaic, Phoenician, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic are included in the West Semitic."⁴¹⁸

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.⁴¹⁹ ("Palestine" [land of the "Philistines," who settled in "Philistia"] is a later name for Canaan.⁴²⁰) The length of these Hamite Canaanite lists indicates the importance of these people and places in Israel's later history. Note the absence of the common sevens in the structuring in Canaan's genealogy, suggesting chaos.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁴Ross, "Genesis," p. 42.

⁴¹⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 213.

⁴¹⁶For helpful diagrams showing the generational relationships of the descendants of Japheth, Ham, and Shem respectively, see Mathews, pp. 440, 444, and 459.

⁴¹⁷For discussion of the identities of each name, see Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, pp. 216-32; or the NET Bible notes on these verses.

⁴¹⁸Finegan, p. 46.

⁴¹⁹For 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.

⁴²⁰See Finegan, p. 135.

⁴²¹Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 164-65.

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 8-10.⁴²² 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."⁴²³

Shem's posterity (vv. 21-31) settled mainly to the northeast and southeast of the Canaanites. This branch of the human family is also important in the Genesis record of Israel's history.

"According to Gen. x. 22, Shem had five sons, Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram, whose descendants peopled and gave name to the following countries:—The descendants of Elam occupied the country called Elymais, between the Lower Tigris and the mountains of Iran; of Asshur, Assyria, lying to the north—the hilly country between the Tigris and the mountain range of Iran; of Arphaxad, the country of *Arrapachitis* on the Upper Tigris, on the eastern banks of that river, where the highlands of Armenia begin to descend. Lud, the father of the Lydians, is the representative of the Semites who went westward to Asia Minor; and Aram of the Semites who spread along the middle course of the Euphrates to the Tigris in the east, and to Syria in the west."⁴²⁴

"When the two lines of Shem are compared (10:21-31; 11:10-26), there is a striking divergence at the point of Eber's descendants, Peleg and Joktan [v. 25]. In chap. 10 Peleg is dropped altogether after his mention, while the nonelect line of Joktan is detailed. It is left to the second lineage in chap. 11 to trace out Peleg's role as ancestral father of Abraham . . ."⁴²⁵

"This Table of Nations, then, traces affiliation of tribes to show relationships, based on some original physical connections.

⁴²²See Finegan, pp. 46-48; Oliver R. Blosser, "Was Nimrod-Sargon of Agade, the First King of Babylon?" *It's About Time* (June 1987), pp. 10-13; Douglas Petrovich, "Identifying Nimrod of Genesis 10 with Sargon of Akkad by Exegetical and Archaeological Means," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:2 (June 2013):273-305.

⁴²³Mathews, p. 456. See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Amorites," by A. R. Millard.

⁴²⁴C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, p. 75.

⁴²⁵Mathews, p. 459.

"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)."⁴²⁶

"The three geographical arcs of the branches intersect at the center—that is, Canaan, Israel's future homeland."⁴²⁷

This section reveals that it was God's plan to bless the human race by dividing the family of man by languages, locations, and leaders. 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). Some creationists believe that the division of the earth in Peleg's day (v. 25) refers to continental drift, but many creationists do not hold this view.⁴²⁸

"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)."⁴²⁹

". . . his intention is not to give an exhaustive list but rather a representative list, one which, for him, is obtained in the number seven."⁴³⁰

"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."⁴³¹

2. The dispersion at Babel 11:1-9

This pericope is a flashback that explains the *division of the earth* in Peleg's time ("in his days the earth was divided"; 10:25). The main emphasis in this section is not the building of the tower of Babel but the *dispersion* of the peoples. We can see this in the literary structure of the passage.⁴³²

⁴²⁶Allen 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.

⁴²⁷Mathews, p. 433. See Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, map 15.

⁴²⁸For 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.

⁴²⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 131.

⁴³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁴³¹Mathews, p. 437. See also Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part II. From Noah to Abraham*, pp. 175-80.

⁴³²Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 235. Cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, p. 22; Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 234-38; and Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 176-77.

- A** All the earth had one language (v. 1)
B there (v. 2)
C one to another (v. 3)
D Come, let's make bricks (v. 3)
E Let's make for ourselves (v. 4)
F a city and a tower
G And the Lord came down to see (v. 5; cf. 8:1)
F' the city and the tower (v. 5)
E' that the humans built (v. 5)
D' Come, let's confuse (v. 7)
C' everyone the language of his neighbor (v. 7)
B' from there (v. 8)
A' (confused) the language of the whole earth (v. 9)

When the people of the world, united by a common ("the same") "language," attempted to preserve their unity, and to "make . . . a name" for themselves by building "a tower" that would reach "into heaven," hoping to achieve God-like power and authority, Yahweh frustrated their plan and scattered everyone "over the face of the whole earth"—by "confusing (their) 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."⁴³³

This story explains to God's people how God scattered the nations and why. Sending judgment upon them 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.

"The ziggurat which stood at Babylon in the days of Hammurabi and was known as Etemenanki, 'the House of the Terrace-platform of Heaven and Earth,' became more famous [than the ziggurat at Ur] and was remembered in biblical tradition as the Tower of Babel, but the zuiggurat [*sic* ziggurat] at Ur is today the best preserved of all monuments of this type and therefore the best fitted to give a vivid impression of their character (Fig. 19)."⁴³⁴

One writer argued for the identification of the tower of Babel incident with the demise and dispersion of the last great Sumerian dynasty centered at Ur.⁴³⁵

⁴³³Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 242.

⁴³⁴Finegan, p. 50.

⁴³⁵Paul 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.

"By placing the Tower of Babel incident just prior to the patriarchal stories, the biblical writer is suggesting, in the first place, that post-Flood humanity is as iniquitous as pre-Flood humanity. Rather than sending something as devastating as a flood to annihilate mankind, however, God now places his hope in a covenant with Abraham as a powerful solution to humanity's sinfulness. Thus problem (ch. 11) and solution (ch. 12) are brought into immediate juxtaposition, and the forcefulness of this structural move would have been lost had ch. 10 intervened between the two."⁴³⁶

"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."⁴³⁷

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)."⁴³⁸

"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."⁴³⁹

11:3-4 The motivation for building "a city" with its "tower" was to make the builders "a name" (i.e., establish world domination, authority, and power in God's place; cf. Ps. 14:1). Later God would "make a name" for Abram (12:2-3). The object of this endeavor was evidently to establish a center by

⁴³⁶Hamilton, 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.

⁴³⁷Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 134.

⁴³⁸Idem, "Genesis," p. 104.

⁴³⁹Mathews, p. 467.

which they might maintain their unity, achieve God-like authority, and gain world domination, with a one-world government.

"A defensive wall is the hallmark of a city (see 4:17). Cities in the ancient Near East were not designed to be lived in but were intended for religious and public purposes."⁴⁴⁰

God desired unity for humankind, but one that He created, not one founded on a social state.⁴⁴¹ 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. *ziqurratu*) 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."⁴⁴²

"A small pavement of rough limestone blocks at Uruk [also known as Erech and Warka, on the Euphrates River about midway between Babylon and the Persian Gulf] is the oldest stone construction in Mesopotamia, and here, too, is found the first ziggurat. The Assyrian-Babylonian word *ziqurratu* comes from the verb *zaqaru* meaning 'to be high, or raised up,' and hence signifies the top of a mountain, or a staged tower. Such a tower provided a sort of artificial mountain in the flat Mesopotamian plain as a high place for a god whose shrine stood on its summit. From its first appearance here at Uruk, it was ever afterward the most characteristic feature of temple architecture in

⁴⁴⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 179.

⁴⁴¹Mathews, p. 473.

⁴⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 470-71. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 179.

Mesopotamia, and the locations of more than two dozen such structures are known today."⁴⁴³

11:5-6 The builders undoubtedly expected to ascend to heaven to meet God. Instead, God descended to earth to meet them ("The LORD came down to see the city and the tower"), another *anthropomorphism* here referring to God's omniscience. If God had allowed this project to continue, the results would have been even worse—and more serious—than they were at this time. The sin of the builders was their refusal to obey God-given directives.

"Depraved humanity are united in their spiritual endeavor to find, through technology, existential meaning apart from God and the means to transgress its boundaries. Unless God intervenes and divides them by confounding their speech, nothing can stop human beings in their overweening pride and their desire for autonomy."⁴⁴⁴

The construction of cities by itself was not sinful. God chose Jerusalem for His people, and He will create the New Jerusalem for believers to inhabit. It is the pride and security that people place in their cities—and their arrogant independence from Himself, the Most High God—that God disapproves.

11:7 God's soliloquy ("Come, let Us go down . . .") in this verse mimics the language of the tower builders in verses 3 and 4 ("Come let us build . . ."; cf. 1:26). The tower was so puny that He had to come "down" to see it (cf. Isa. 40:22). The confusion of language probably involved more than just the introduction of new words, since the original single language dispersed, and over time further divided into a myriad of new languages and dialects—the thousands that we have today..

"If language is the audible expression of emotions, conceptions, and thoughts of the mind, the cause of the confusion or division of the one human language into different national dialects might be sought in an effect produced upon the human mind, by which the original unity of emotion, conception, thought, and will was broken up. This inward unity had no doubt been already disturbed by sin, but the disturbance had not yet amounted to a perfect breach."⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴³Finegan, p. 23.

⁴⁴⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 182.

⁴⁴⁵Keil and Delitzsch, 1:174-75.

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.⁴⁴⁶

- 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. This is the third great judgment on sinful humanity in this first major section of Genesis (chs. 1—11), the first two being Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden, and the second being the Flood.

Some interpreters take the confusion of languages to have been a local phenomenon only. One writer believed that lightning struck the tower of Babel, and the confusion of speech that followed resulted from a scrambling of the electrical circuits in the brains of those struck.⁴⁴⁷ This is an interesting idea but impossible to prove. Most interpreters, however, regard this event as the source of the major language groups in the world today.

- 11:9 "Babel" sounds like the Hebrew word for "confuse" (*balal*), and it means "the gate of gods" in Akkadian.

". . . Gen 11:1-9, the tower of Babel story, is a satire on the claims of Babylon to be the center of civilization and its temple tower the gate of heaven (E[numa]E[lish] 6:50-80): Babel does not mean gate of God, but 'confusion' and 'folly.' Far from its temple's top reaching up to heaven, it is so low that God has to descend from heaven just to see it! (11:4-9)."⁴⁴⁸

This was the original "Babylon" (the Greek form of "Babel"), that forever afterward was the city most characterized by rebellion against God's authority, and the desire to earn salvation by works, idolatry, and self-assertion. It stands as a symbol of organized rebellion against God elsewhere in Scripture, and God will eventually destroy it (Rev. 17 and 18). The *spirit of Babel* is strong throughout the world today.⁴⁴⁹

"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."⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁶See Merrill, "The Peoples . . .," p. 22.

⁴⁴⁷James E. Strickling, "The Tower of Babel and the Confusion of Tongues," *Kronos* (Fall 1982), pp. 53-62.

⁴⁴⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. xlviiii-xlix.

⁴⁴⁹See Everett H. Peterson, "Prehistory and the Tower of Babel," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 19:2 (September 1982):87-90.

⁴⁵⁰J. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, p. 18.

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."⁴⁵¹

"The Bible doesn't tell us what skin color our first parents had, but, from a design point of view, the 'middle [color]' makes a great beginning. Starting with medium-skinned parents (AaBb), it would take only one generation to produce all the variation we see in human skin color today. In fact, this is the normal situation in India today. Some Indians are as dark as the darkest Africans, and some—perhaps a brother or sister in the same family—as light as the lightest Europeans. I once knew a family from India that 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 possible combination of **AB** egg and sperm cells, which are the only types that can be produced by **AABB** parents.) Similarly, parents with very light skins (**aabb**) can have only very light-skinned children, since they don't have any **A** or **B** genes to pass on. Even certain medium-skinned parents (**AAbb** or **aaBB**) can get 'locked-in' to having only medium-skinned children, like the Orientals, Polynesians, and some of my ancestors, the Native Americans.

"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*. . . .

⁴⁵¹A plaque explaining an exhibit at the Institute for Creation Research Museum, Santee, Calif., which I observed on May 21, 1997.

"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.)"⁴⁵²

"Many thinkers labor under the illusion that evolution is an empirical science when in fact it is a philosophy."⁴⁵³

3. The Babel story demonstrates the inclination of fallen man to rebel against God, and to try to provide for his needs, in his own way—rather than by trusting and obeying God.
4. It illustrates that rebellion against God results in: (a) broken fellowship between 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, since Abraham, the great patriarch and father of the Hebrews, 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.

⁴⁵²G. 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.

⁴⁵³Norman L. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:1 (March 1999):7.

"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."⁴⁵⁴

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."⁴⁵⁵

"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."⁴⁵⁶

In contrast to the genealogy in chapter 5, this one emphasizes life and expansion rather than death, even though longevity was declining.⁴⁵⁷ This genealogy starts with Noah's son Shem, whom God blessed, and it concludes with Abram, whom God purposed to bless. This is the line of Israel's ancestors. It is a "vertical" list, of the type used in the ancient Near East to document legitimate claims to thrones or inheritances.⁴⁵⁸ This genealogy, as the one in chapter 5, appears to be complete. Note that the pattern Moses followed in this list is: "X lived so many years and begat Y, and X lived ___ more years and begat other children." This is the same pattern we find in chapter 5, except that *there*, the final notation is: "X lived a total of ___ years and died." The purpose of this genealogy in chapter 11 is to connect Abram to Noah, and to give background information essential for understanding the story of Abram that follows.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁴Allen 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.

⁴⁵⁵Mathews, p. 487.

⁴⁵⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. li.

⁴⁵⁷For short histories of the prepatribal 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*.

⁴⁵⁸Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 249.

⁴⁵⁹Mathews, p. 488, included a helpful chart of the 20 generations from Adam to Abram.

". . . the author's aim is to show that God's promise concerning the seed of the woman cannot be thwarted by the confusion and scattering of the nations at Babylon."⁴⁶⁰

"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."⁴⁶¹

"An extensive statistical analysis of the life-spans of the patriarchs, as given in Genesis Chapter 5 and 11, shows that statistically the life-span can be considered constant before the Flood, while after the Flood the data can be fitted by an asymptotic exponential decay curve. Also, it is concluded that as for the life-spans reported in Genesis Chapter 11, the data in the Masoretic text are the authentic ones; those in the Septuagint have been tampered with. Moreover, it is statistically unlikely that there are gaps in the genealogies in Genesis Chapter 11."⁴⁶²

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 Greek 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.⁴⁶³

Most scholars regard "Eber" (v. 14) as the individual from whom the Jews received the name "Hebrew."⁴⁶⁴ 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).

"With 11:26 the scene has finally been set for the patriarchal history to unfold. The opening chapters of Genesis have provided us the

⁴⁶⁰Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 136.

⁴⁶¹Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. lii.

⁴⁶²William L. Seaver, "A Statistical Analysis of the Genesis Life-Spans," *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 20:2 (September 1983):80.

⁴⁶³See M. S. Mills, "A Comparison of the Genesis and Lukan Genealogies (The Case for Cainan)" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978).

⁴⁶⁴See Matthew Akers, "What's in a Name? An Examination of the Usage of the Term 'Hebrew' in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55:4 (December 2012):685-96.

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)."⁴⁶⁵

"Four key concepts presented in Genesis 1 through 11 are crucial for comprehending the rest of the Bible. First, the God who entered the lives of Abram and Sarai is the same God who created the entire universe. He is the only true and living God—Yahweh, the Creator and the Savior of the world. Second, all people have rebelled against God, their benevolent Creator, and His good will for them. Humanity has inherited a state of sinfulness from Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden. Third, God judges and will judge the actions of all people. God, by sending the Flood, made it clear to Noah and to everyone that human wickedness is entirely unacceptable. God cannot let evil reign free in His creation. Fourth, sin continues to plague all of humanity—even after the Flood. Although the Flood did not wash away sin, God, as the second half of Genesis (chs. 12—50) reveals, has a plan to save humanity from its own evil deeds."⁴⁶⁶

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 from about 1876 B.C. This is the probable date when Jacob's family moved to Egypt (ch. 46).

⁴⁶⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 253-54.

⁴⁶⁶*The Nelson . . .*, pp. 1-2.

From these two texts we can calculate other dates in the patriarchal period.⁴⁶⁷

The historicity of the patriarchs continues to be a matter of scholarly debate. The problem is the lack of explicit reference to the patriarchs in nonbiblical literature and in archaeology ("the scientific study of the material remains of the past"⁴⁶⁸). Scholars who reject the biblical testimony as unauthentic have been labeled "minimalists," and those who believe that the Hebrew Bible credibly supplements nonbiblical material are known as "maximalists." I am one of the latter, believing that the biblical records reliably testify to historical individuals and events recorded in this section of Genesis.⁴⁶⁹

"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."⁴⁷⁰

"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."⁴⁷¹

PATRIARCHAL CHRONOLOGICAL DATA⁴⁷²		
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

⁴⁶⁷For 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.

⁴⁶⁸Finegan, p. 3.

⁴⁶⁹For a good discussion of the historicity of the patriarchs and the authenticity of the patriarchal accounts, see Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 24-55, or Wolf, pp. 113-17.

⁴⁷⁰H. H. Rowley, "Recent Discovery and the Patriarchal Age," in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, p. 318.

⁴⁷¹Eugene 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.

⁴⁷²From Eugene H. Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:547 (July-September 1980):248.

PATRIARCHAL CHRONOLOGICAL DATA (CONT.)		
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
1879	Beginning of famine	Gen. 41:54
1878	Brothers' first visit to Egypt	Gen. 42:1-3
1877	Judah's incest with Tamar	Gen. 38:18
1877	Brothers' second visit to Egypt	Gen. 43:1, 15; 45:6, 11
1876	Jacob's descent to Egypt	Gen. 46:6; cf. 47:9
1859	Death of Jacob	Gen. 47:28
1806	Death of Joseph	Gen. 50:22

II. PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVES 11:27—50:26

One of the significant changes in the emphasis that occurs at this point in Genesis, is from *cursing*, in the primeval record, to *blessing*, in the patriarchal narratives. The Abrahamic Covenant is most important in this respect. How Abram's family gained and provided these blessings unfolds. Israel could, and we can, identify with their experiences.

"Chapters 1—11 are set in Babylonia; chs. 12—36 are set in Palestine; chs. 37—50 are set in Egypt. (The same kind of tripartite geographical focus emerges from Exodus: [1] 1:1—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)."⁴⁷³

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 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."⁴⁷⁴

"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."⁴⁷⁵

Some notable changes take place in the second part of Genesis, though both parts begin with a creation initiated by the spoken word of God (1:1; 12:1). Instead of the genealogies being prominent and the stories secondary, as in chapters 1—11, the reverse becomes true now. God retreats further 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,

⁴⁷³Hamilton, pp. 10, 11.

⁴⁷⁴Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 39.

⁴⁷⁵Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 1.

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.⁴⁷⁶

A. WHAT BECAME OF TERAH 11:27—25:11

This is the sixth and central (most important) of the 11 *toledot* sections in Genesis.

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.⁴⁷⁷ Walter Kaiser labeled the three things promised Abram as "an heir, a heritage, and an inheritance."⁴⁷⁸ David Clines called them "posterity, relationship with God, and land."⁴⁷⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost and Robert L. Saucy referred to them as "seed, blessing, and land."⁴⁸⁰

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.

"A line of successive representative sons of the patriarchs who were regarded as one with the whole group they represented matched the seminal idea already advocated in Genesis 3:15. Furthermore, in the concept of 'seed' were the two aspects of the seed as a future *benefit* and the seed as the present *beneficiaries* of God's temporal and spiritual gifts. Consequently, 'seed' was always a collective singular noun; never did it appear as a plural noun (e.g., as in 'sons'). Thereby the 'seed' was marked as a unit, yet with a flexibility of reference: now to the one person, now to the many descendants of that family. This interchange of reference with its implied corporate solidarity was more than a cultural phenomena [*sic* phenomenon] or an accident of careless editing; it was part and parcel of its doctrinal intention."⁴⁸¹

The promise of universal blessing recurs in 18:18; 22:18 (to Abraham); 26:4 (to Isaac); and 28:14 (to Jacob). God reiterated His purpose with additional detail to Abraham in 13:14-17; 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).

⁴⁷⁶Ibid., p. 258. See also Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 25

⁴⁷⁷See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 169.

⁴⁷⁸Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, pp. 35, 84-99.

⁴⁷⁹David Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, pp. 29, 45-60.

⁴⁸⁰J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 65-94; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 42.

⁴⁸¹Kaiser, *Toward an . . .*, pp. 88-89.

"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."⁴⁸²

Genesis 12—50 focuses on the promise of posterity (an heir, seed), though the other promises receive much attention. Exodus and Leviticus deal more with the promise of worldwide influence (relationship with God, heritage, blessing), and Numbers and Deuteronomy emphasize the promise of real estate (land, inheritance, and rest).

To provide these blessings, God had to overcome many obstacles. Each obstacle provided an opportunity for Abram to grow stronger in faith, and each one tested his faith. Each episode in the Abraham narrative reveals something important about God's power and faithfulness. It should also teach the reader something about responding to God's promises in the midst of various difficulties. This is the plot of the Abraham narrative.

In 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 Promised Land? Who will be Abram's promised heir? These are the great questions that the thoughtful reader continually asks as he reads the story of Abram. At least one of these questions is central in every incident in Abram's life that God has chosen to record in Genesis. These questions form the unifying theme of the Abram narrative.⁴⁸³

One writer called the form in which Moses revealed Abram's story an "obstacle story."

"Few literary techniques have enjoyed so universal and perennial a vogue as the obstacle story. It is found in ancient and modern literature from the Gilgamesh epic and the Odyssey to the Perils of Pauline and the latest novel. Its character is episodal in that it is not self-contained but finds its *raison d'etre* in its relation to the larger story or narrative of which it is a part. Its purpose is to arouse suspense and sustain interest by recounting episodes which threaten or retard the fulfillment of what the reader either suspects or hopes or knows to be the ending of the story."⁴⁸⁴

Twelve crises arise as the story of Abram's life unfolds. Each of these must be overcome—and IS overcome by God—who eventually does provide Abram's descendants. Each of these problems constituted a challenge to Abram's faith. Is God faithful and powerful enough to provide what He promised? In the end we can see that He is.

⁴⁸²Mathews, *Genesis 1—11:26*, p. 59.

⁴⁸³See 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; and Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 262.

⁴⁸⁴Peter E. Ellis, *The Yahwist, the Bible's First Theologian*, p. 136.

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, so that the Israelites would emulate Abram's faith. Abram was not without his flaws, and his failings prove as instructive as his successes, as is true of all biblical characters.

The following were the 12 obstacles that Abraham encountered in his faith journey:

1. Sarai was barren and incapable of producing an heir (11:30).
2. Abram had to leave the Promised Land, which God had told him he would inherit (12:10).
3. Abram's life was in danger in Egypt (12:11-20).
4. Abram's nephew (heir?) Lot (Lot's servants) quarreled with him (Abram's servants) over the land (ch. 13).
5. Abram entered a war and could have died (14:1-16).
6. Abram's life was in danger from retaliation in the Promised Land (15:1).
7. God ruled Eliezer out as Abram's heir (15:2-3).
8. Hagar, pregnant with Abram's son (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."⁴⁸⁵

1. Terah and Abram's obedience 11:27—12:9

All that Moses wrote in this pericope (11:27—12:9) deals with Abram and his future in the Promised Land. Abram obeyed the Lord's command to relocate to a land that God would give to him and his descendants with the promise that he would become a blessing to the rest of the world. Abram's example of obedience is a model for all believers to forsake all else 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."⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁵Helyer, p. 80. See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 90, for a diagram of the chiasmic structure of the Abraham narrative.

⁴⁸⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 281.

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)."⁴⁸⁷

Abram evidently grew up in the city of "Ur [of the Chaldeans]." A few scholars believe that the "Ur" in view was located just east of Haran, near the top of the Fertile Crescent (cf. 24:4, 7, 10).⁴⁸⁸ However, most hold that it was the Ur in southern Mesopotamia. Since the Chaldeans later lived in southern Mesopotamia, this seems to be the correct site.

"Ur 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."⁴⁸⁹

"In the ruins of Ur at about this time [2070–2060 B.C.] there are some twenty houses per acre. Assuming six to ten persons per house, there were 120 to 200 people per acre, the average figure of 160 being exactly the same as the population density of modern Damascus [in 1959]. Ur covered 150 acres, and it may therefore be estimated that the population was approximately 24,000 inhabitants."⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 109.

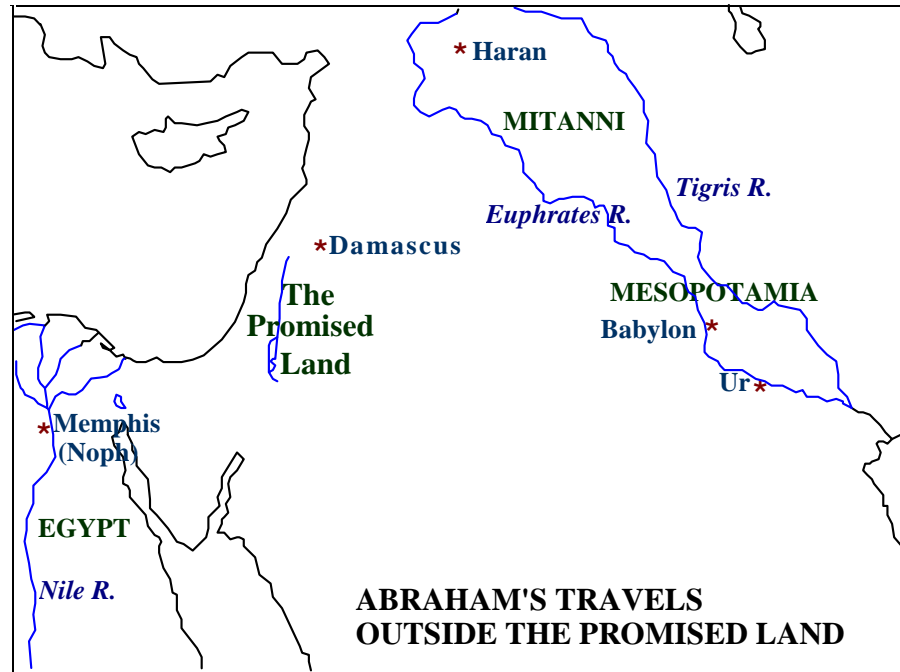
⁴⁸⁸E.g., Beitzel, pp. 80-81. Cf. Finegan, pp. 70-71.

⁴⁸⁹*The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, p. 28. See also Finegan, pp. 56-57, 67-68, 200–201.

⁴⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 52.

"If Abraham did come from Mesopotamia sometime in the early second millennium B.C., it is necessary to revise the picture sometimes painted of him as a primitive nomad accustomed only to open spaces of the desert, and to recognize that at least to some extent he must have been the heir of a complex and age-old civilization."⁴⁹¹

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.⁴⁹²



"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"⁴⁹³

"There was no serious language barrier anywhere in the Fertile Crescent [in the time of the patriarchs], since West Semitic was understood everywhere and the related Accadian of Babylonia was the *lingua franca*, the tongue of diplomacy and business. Moreover, political and cultural ties between Egypt and Palestine continued to be close, and Egyptian was understood in all important Palestinian centres, while West Semitic was spoken in many parts of northern Egypt."⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹¹Ibid., p. 73.

⁴⁹²Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 272; Mathews, *11:27—50:26*, p. 100.

⁴⁹³W. 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.

⁴⁹⁴Albright, *The Archaeology . . .*, pp. 204-5.

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).

"Election is one of the central realities of the Old Testament; even though it is less frequently mentioned than the covenant it is however the initial act by which Yahweh comes into relation with his people and the permanent reality which assures the constancy of that bond. Every intervention by God in history is an election: either when he chooses a place in which to make more especial manifestation of his presence, or when he chooses a people to carry out his intention, or when he chooses a man to be his representative or his messenger, the Old Testament God is the one who has universal sovereignty at his disposal, and shows it by the free use that he makes of it."⁴⁹⁵

Abram's family members were polytheists (Josh. 24:2).

"Several of Abram's relations have names that suggest adherence to lunar worship (cf. Sarah, Milcah, Laban), a cult that was prominent in Ur and Haran [*sic* Haran]."⁴⁹⁶

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). "Endogamy" is the practice of marrying within a family group. 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 exodus from his homeland, and Israel's Exodus from Egypt, were two key events in the formation of national Israel.

"It appears that Terah, for his own reasons, decided to move from Ur to Canaan. He began the journey with several members of his family. However, they went to Haran, where Terah died. This was the first step of the journey of Abram and Sarai to the land of promise."⁴⁹⁷

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."⁴⁹⁸

When the patriarch Terah died, Abram continued his trek toward Canaan in obedience to God's call.

"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

⁴⁹⁵Jacob, p. 201.

⁴⁹⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 252. Cf. Josh. 24:2.

⁴⁹⁷*The Nelson . . .*, p. 25.

⁴⁹⁸George Van Pelt Campbell, "Refusing God's Blessing: An Exposition of Genesis 11:27-32," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:659 (July-September 2008):282.

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."⁴⁹⁹

Archaeologists have dated the Nuzi tablets four or five hundred years after the patriarchs, but they reflect customs that had been prevalent for centuries.⁵⁰⁰ We should be careful not to overemphasize the influence of Hurrian civilization, however.⁵⁰¹

"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."⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹Stuart West, "The Nuzi Tablets," *Bible and Spade* 10:3-4 (Summer-Autumn 1981):66. See also Albright, *The Archaeology . . .*, p. 184.

⁵⁰⁰See Finegan, p. 65-67; and M. J. Selman, "The Social Environment of the Patriarchs," *Tyndale Bulletin* 27 (1976):114-36.

⁵⁰¹Ephraim Speiser did this in his commentary on Genesis.

⁵⁰²Bright, pp. 48-49. See also Finegan, pp. 139-50.

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."⁵⁰³

"Whereas chapters 1—11 generally portray man's rebellion, chapters 12—50 detail God's bringing man into a place of blessing."⁵⁰⁴

". . . this is the central passage of the Book of Genesis."⁵⁰⁵

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."⁵⁰⁶

"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."⁵⁰⁷

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;

⁵⁰³Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 274.

⁵⁰⁴Ross, "Genesis," p. 25.

⁵⁰⁵Ibid., p. 47.

⁵⁰⁶Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 139.

⁵⁰⁷Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. li-lii.

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).

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 and NKJV capture this with the translation "The Lord had said to Abram." So the beginning of chapter 12 flashes back to something that happened in Ur, even though chapter 11 ends with Abram in Haran. Stephen's statement in Acts 7:2 supports this interpretation. Stephen quoted the Septuagint translation of this verse in Acts 7:3.

"The LORD" called Abram to leave his homeland, and to proceed to a different country.

"The name Yahweh, translated as LORD, is not explained until Ex. 3:14, 15. But the readers of Genesis needed to know that the one who spoke to Abram is the same Yahweh who later would form the nation of Israel and who had created all things (2:4) [and had called them out of Egypt to a new land]."⁵⁰⁸

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. Lot chose to accompany Abram; Abram did not choose to take Lot with him.

The focus of God's command was that Abram should *uproot* himself, and follow His leading. God called him to leave three things, which were progressively more difficult: his "country," his family ("relatives"), and his "father's house." His country was his *home region*, his family was his *clan*, and his father's house was his *branch* of his clan. In Abram's world such a move was unheard of.

"Only the poverty-stricken or the defeated would wander; only the landless and the fugitive would move about and leave their ancestral homes."⁵⁰⁹

"It has been well remarked that the very essence of the history of Israel is in the words, 'Get thee out!' [AV]"⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁸The Nelson . . . , p. 25.

⁵⁰⁹Ibid.

⁵¹⁰William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, p. 246.

"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."⁵¹¹

". . . 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)."⁵¹²

12:2-3 Abram had only a promise from God. We see his faith in his willingness to *obey* God—based solely 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 at this point included few details; it was only a general promise of descendants (v. 2) and influence (vv. 2-3). The Hebrew text says, "be a blessing" (v. 2), not "you shall be a blessing." 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.

There are seven elements in this promise—*seven*—suggesting fullness and completeness (cf. 2:2-3): (1) God promised to create "a great nation" through Abram. (2) God promised to "bless" Abram. (3) Abram's "name" would live on after his lifetime ("I will make your name great"). (4) Abram was (commanded) to "be a blessing" to others. (5) God would "bless those who bless[ed]" Abram. (6) And God would "curse those who curs[ed]" Abram. (7) "All the families of the earth [would] be blessed" through Abram and his descendants.

⁵¹¹Pentecost, p. 60. See also Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Evidence from Genesis," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 54.

⁵¹²Walvoord, p. 191.

"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.'"⁵¹³

"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)."⁵¹⁴

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." Even just *disdain* for Abraham would provoke God's judgment.

"Why is there suffering in the world? One answer is that some people and nations have chosen not to bless Abraham and his descendants."⁵¹⁵

God's ultimate purpose was to bless "all the peoples of the earth" through Abram and his seed.⁵¹⁶ Abram's call and obedient response form a foundation for all that follows concerning him, his immediate descendants, and his later descendants. When God called Abram, He took a new approach to blessing the human race. These verses constitute a programmatic statement, a statement that lays out God's program concerning the future.

⁵¹³Pentecost, 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.

⁵¹⁴Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 282.

⁵¹⁵Bramer, p. 92.

⁵¹⁶William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 65, explained how the Hebrew construction of verses 1-3 makes this evident. See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 72-80, for proof that the theme of the patriarchal narratives is blessing. He listed as major motifs (recurring key words or ideas) in these stories: sibling rivalry, deception, and alienation/separation.

"Any promise God gives must be appropriated by faith."⁵¹⁷

"The remarkable thing about Abraham was his deep, unwavering faith."⁵¹⁸

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)."⁵¹⁹ This interpretation applies the promise to the *spiritual* seed of Abraham (Christians), but not to the physical seed (Jews). 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.⁵²⁰

Probably Abram viewed Lot as his *heir* (cf. 11:27-32; 12:4-5; 13:1-2).

"Since Mesopotamian law-codes allowed for the adoption of an heir in the case of childlessness, this becomes an attractive hypothesis with respect to Lot."⁵²¹

⁵¹⁷Pentecost, pp. 51-52.

⁵¹⁸Davis, p. 168.

⁵¹⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 206.

⁵²⁰See *ibid.*, p. 207.

⁵²¹Helyer, p. 82.

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.

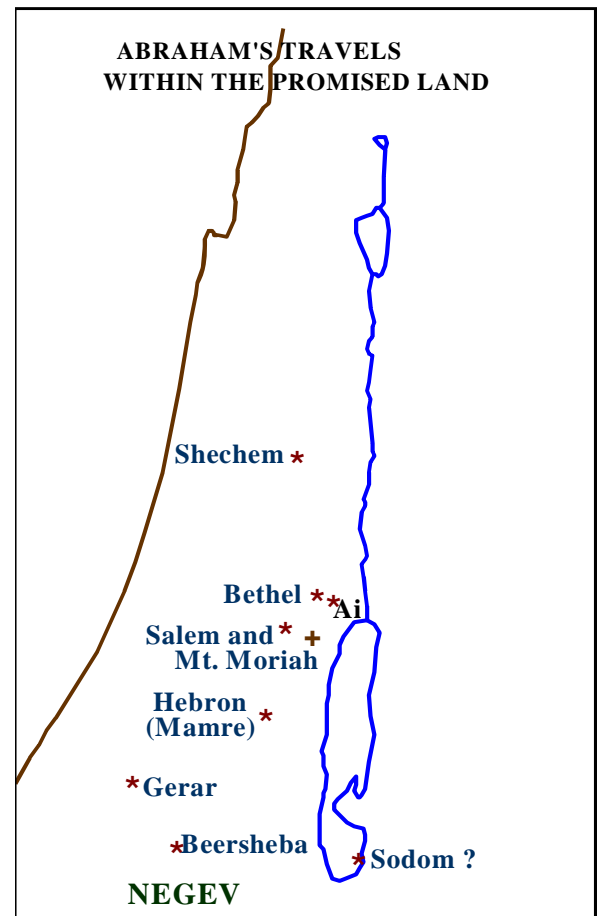
12:5-6 Abram's first settlement was in "Shechem."⁵²²

". . . towns on the main caravan route southwest-ward from the Euphrates which figure significantly in the Abram stories, are Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and Gerar."⁵²³

Shechem became sacred to the Israelites, because it was here that 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.⁵²⁴ "Moreh" means "teacher," so "the tree (oak) of Moreh" may have been a pagan site for oracles.

"Here Abraham began symbolically taking possession of the land that would one day be the territory of the Great Teacher and His instruction."⁵²⁵

The reference to the *Canaanites'* presence in the land prepares the narrative for incidents of conflict, with these native inhabitants, that followed in Israel's history (cf. 10:15-19). It also denotes a barrier to the fulfillment, of God's promise, to give Abram and his heirs the land (v. 7).



⁵²²See the map "Abraham's Travels within the Promised Land" above.

⁵²³Albright, "Abram . . .," p. 47.

⁵²⁴See Finegan, pp. 183-84.

⁵²⁵*The Nelson . . .*, p. 26.

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 ("this land"), the patriarch "built an altar" and *worshipped* Yahweh. This was Abram's characteristic response to God's grace. Abram's altars were more permanent structures than his tents. He continued living as a pilgrim and stranger in a land that he did not yet possess (Heb. 11:9-10).

Critics of the historicity of the patriarchal narratives ("minimalists") have tried to prove that the religion of the patriarchs differed greatly from Mosaic orthodoxy and even Christian norms. While there was some difference, there is no solid evidence that the patriarchs worshipped a different God than subsequent Israelites worshipped.⁵²⁶

12:8 Abram proceeded south, and encamped ("pitched his tent") between "Bethel" and "Ai" (lit. "Ruin," probably "et Tell"⁵²⁷), 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," a transliteration of the Hebrew word for "south"), perhaps because of a shortage of food for his grazing animals (v. 10).

Many years later 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."⁵²⁸

2. Abram in Egypt 12:10-20

The second crisis Abram faced arose because of a famine in Canaan. Abram chose to "sojourn" (reside temporarily) in the Nile Valley until it ended. In this incident, Abram misrepresented Sarai because he feared for his life ("they will kill me," v. 12).⁵²⁹ By doing so, he jeopardized his blessing, for he lost his wife temporarily to Pharaoh ("the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house"). However, Yahweh intervened to deliver Abram and Sarai from Egypt.

⁵²⁶For a fuller discussion of the religion of the patriarchs, see Mathews, Genesis 11:27—50:26, pp. 55-71.

⁵²⁷Peter Briggs, "Testing the Factuality of the Conquest of Ai Narrative in the Book of Joshua," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, Col., Nov. 15, 2001.

⁵²⁸Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 118.

⁵²⁹See Robert R. Gonzalez Jr., *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives*.

"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. What he has done with Abraham, he will do for his people today and tomorrow."⁵³⁰

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.⁵³¹ God blessed Abram in Egypt, ironically mainly through Sarai, 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."⁵³²

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 (Babylonia) to protect him. They suggest that this custom was evidently unknown in Egypt. Because he failed to perceive this, Abram got into trouble.

"The thrice repeated story [involving Abraham in 12:10-20 and 20:1-18, and Isaac in 26:6-12] has been the subject of much discussion by commentators through the ages, but only with the discoveries at Nuzi has it become clear that Abraham and Isaac were not involved in any trickery, but were endeavoring to protect their respective wives from molestation by invoking the Hurrian custom or law of wife-sistership. According to the Nuzi tablets a woman having 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

⁵³⁰Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 116-17.

⁵³¹See 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.

⁵³²Hamilton, p. 386. See Peter D. Miscall, *The Workings of Old Testament Narrative*, pp. 42-45.

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."⁵³³

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 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, who "took" Sarai because he believed that she was just Abram's *physical sister*. When Pharaoh discovered that Sarai was *also* Abram's "wife," he returned Sarai to Abram, because Pharaoh regarded the "husband/wife" relationship as sacred. He was angry with Abram, because in Pharaoh's eyes, Abram had misrepresented his relationship with Sarai.

Those who hold this view see this incident as an example of failure to adjust to a foreign culture and failure to trust God. They usually understand Abram's motivation as having been confidence in a *cultural custom* from his past, rather than faith in God.⁵³⁴

Most interpreters have concluded that Abram, on the other hand, was being rather dishonest about his relationship with Sarai, and was telling a half-truth to save his own life (cf. 20:12). Evidently it was possible for brothers to fend off suitors of their sisters with *promises of marriage*—without 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).⁵³⁵

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).

⁵³³West, p. 67. See also Speiser, pp. 91-92.

⁵³⁴For 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.

⁵³⁵For a helpful though not entirely accurate study, from my viewpoint, which compares the three incidents in which the patriarchs claimed their wives were their sisters in Genesis 12, 20, and 26, see Robert Polzin, "The Ancestress of Israel in Danger' in Danger," *Semeia* 3 (1975):81-98. See also Mathews' good explanation of the wife-sister episodes in Genesis, in *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 124-26.

"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."⁵³⁶

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. But we can count on God to fulfill His promises to us, in spite of threatening circumstances. We should therefore remain faithful and honest.

"The integrity and honesty of a child of God are among his most potent weapons in spreading the gospel."⁵³⁷

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 PHARAOHS IN THE GENESIS PERIOD⁵³⁸

PREHISTORY (to ca. 3100 BC)

EARLY DYNASTIES (dynasties 1-2; ca. 3100–2686 BC)

Menes (first Pharaoh) united upper and lower Egypt.

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).

Djoser (Zoser; 2nd Pharaoh of 3rd dynasty) built the first stepped pyramid (south of Cairo).

Cheops (Khufu; 2nd Pharaoh of 4th dynasty) built the Great (largest) Pyramid at Gizeh (near Cairo).

Chephren (Khafre; 4th Pharaoh of 4th dynasty) built the still capped pyramid near the Sphinx (near Cairo).

FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD (dynasties 7-10; ca. 2181–2040 BC) Capital: Thebes (No)

⁵³⁶Ross, "Genesis," p. 49. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 217.

⁵³⁷Davis, p. 178.

⁵³⁸Based on the *Cambridge Ancient History*. All identifications are probable. See also Finegan, ch. 2: "The Panorama of Egypt."

MIDDLE KINGDOM (dynasties 11-14; ca. 2033–1603 BC) Capital: Memphis (Noph).
 Period of culture and civilization.

Inyotef II (2117–2069 BC; 3rd Pharaoh of 11th dynasty) entertained Abram (Gen. 12:15).

Ammenemes II (1929–1895 BC; 3rd Pharaoh of 12th dynasty) ruled when Joseph arrived in Egypt (Gen. 37:36).

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).

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).

Ammenemes III (1842–1797 BC; 6th Pharaoh of 12th dynasty) ruled when Joseph died (Gen. 50:26).

SYNOPTIC CHRONOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST				
Dates	Periods	Ancient Near East	Canaan	Scripture
3150–2200 B.C.	<i>Early Bronze Age</i> (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.	<i>Middle Bronze Age</i> (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.	<i>Late Bronze Age</i> (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.	<i>Iron Age I</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.	<i>Iron Age II</i> (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
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In Old Testament studies, some writers describe the "before Christ" (B.C.) period as "B.C.E." This stands for "before the common era." These writers also refer to the A.D. (Lat. *anno domini*, "year of our Lord") period as "C.E.," the "common era."

The first reference to "camels" in Scripture occurs in verse 16. For many years, scholars believed that the ancients did not domesticate camels until much later than the patriarchal period. They believed that references to camels in Genesis indicated historical inaccuracies. However, the archaeological evidence for the early domestication of camels has proven these critics wrong.⁵³⁹ The Hebrew word does not distinguish whether these were one- or two-humped camels.

"They represented great wealth; to have a camel in this period was like having an expensive limousine."⁵⁴⁰

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)."⁵⁴¹

This is the first fulfillment of God's promise to bless those who blessed Abram, and to curse those who cursed him (12:3).

3. Abram's separation from Lot ch. 13

This chapter records how Abram, though challenged by a major conflict with Lot due to "strife" (v. 4) between their herdsmen, magnanimously gave his nephew a choice of whichever 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.

⁵³⁹See John J. Davis, "The Camel in Biblical Narratives," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, pp. 141-52.

⁵⁴⁰*The Nelson . . .*, p. 28.

⁵⁴¹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 292.

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."⁵⁴²

Note also Lot's similarity to Esau.

13:5-7 When it became clear that there was not enough pasture to sustain all the flocks of *both* Abram and Lot ("the land could not sustain them . . . their possessions were so great"), 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 seems 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 that time, as *the heir* through whom God would fulfill His promises.

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 in two "halves"; he would take one half and his nephew the other (cf. 22:3-10). Important to our appreciation of Abram's offer is knowledge of the fact that the Hebrews, as well as other ancient peoples, were eastern-oriented (as contrasted with 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). So when Abram offered Lot what was on his left, he was referring to northern Canaan, including the area around Shechem (cf. 12:6; 33:18—34:31; 37:12-17), going as far south as Bethel and Ai. The other choice was what was on their right: southern Canaan including Hebron and the Negev (cf. 13:6, 9; 13:1, 18; 20:1; et al.). Both men had previously lived in both regions.

Moses' description of the Jordan Valley as being similar to Egypt ("like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt"; v. 10) should have warned

⁵⁴²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 38.

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 the options Abram offered: north ("left") or south ("right"). Instead, he decided to move "east" into the Jordan Valley (v. 11). Earlier we read that Adam, Eve, and Cain traveled east after they sinned (3:24; 4:16), and that the people of Babel went east and rebelled against God (11:2). Thus Lot's move east makes us a bit uneasy (cf. 12:3). At that time, the Jordan River was the eastern border of Canaan, and it continued going 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, along the edges of the border of the Promised Land (v. 11).

The location of Sodom is still uncertain. There are three primary possibilities: northeast of the Dead Sea,⁵⁴³ southeast of the Dead Sea, or under the southern basin of the Dead Sea. The second option seems most probable.

". . . this choice by Lot made rather final the rupture between him and Abram."⁵⁴⁴

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 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."⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴³See Steven Collins, "Where Is Sodom? The Case for Tall el-Hammam," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 39:2 (March/April 2013):32-41, 70.

⁵⁴⁴Harold Stigers, *Commentary on Genesis*, p. 146.

⁵⁴⁵James Monson, *The Land Between*, pp. 163-64.

Lot's choice seems to have been influenced, to some extent, by a desire to ally himself with the native inhabitants (cf. 13:7, 12; 19:1-26), as well as by the natural fruitfulness of the Jordan Valley (v. 10).

"In any given situation, what you are determines what you see, and what you see determines what you do."⁵⁴⁶

"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)."⁵⁴⁷

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" too (v. 14), but *he saw the whole land*—as far as he could see in every direction ("northward and southward and eastward and westward"). God repeated His promise to give him and his descendants all the land he saw. This promise was more specific than God's previous promises regarding the seed and the land (12:2, 7). This was God's third revelation to Abram. It contained three specifics:

1. Abram's heir would be *his own seed* (offspring; vv. 15-16).
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, and is hyperbole (v. 16; cf. 2:7). The "stars" figure given later (15:5) suggests *heavenly* or *spiritual* seed, in addition to physical seed, and is also hyperbole.

God's encouragement to walk through the land (v. 17) implied that Abram should claim the promise by treading the land under his feet. In the ancient Near East, victorious armies claimed defeated territory by marching through it.

"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

⁵⁴⁶Haddon Robinson, *Leadership* 3:1 (Winter 1982):104.

⁵⁴⁷Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 144.

'covenant of grant.' It was made at the initiative of the granter and often with no preconditions or qualifications."⁵⁴⁸

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, or a single-minded and a double-minded believer (James 1:8; 4:8). When Abram gave Lot the choice of where he wanted to live, Abram was giving up any claim to temporal advantages, and was trusting God to bless him as God had promised He would. This step of faith led to greater blessing by God (vv. 14-17). Abram's response to this fresh revelation, again, was worship ("he built an altar to the LORD").

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 he 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 on 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 God fulfilling His promises to him. His wife was barren, he had to leave the land, his life was in danger, and his anticipated heir showed no interest in the Promised Land. Now he became involved in a war and consequently became the target of retaliation by four powerful kings.

⁵⁴⁸Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 36, n. 39.

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 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.⁵⁴⁹ Most likely they were one of the early tribal groups that inhabited Canaan when Abram entered the land. They appear to have been very powerful, and apparently some of their neighbors regarded them as super-human, before and or after their heyday.⁵⁵⁰

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 oceans' 3 percent average. Josephus referred to it as Lake Asphaltitis.⁵⁵¹

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 a target for retaliation. Almost everyone in the ancient Near East practiced retaliation, and it is still a major factor in the continuing political turmoil that characterizes the Middle East to this day. The "ancient Near East" is a term that applies to the whole eastern Mediterranean world in *ancient* times. The "Middle East" is a term that refers to the area at the confluence of Africa, Europe, and Asia in *modern* times. 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. His attitude was not: "He's made his own bed; let him lie in it." Perhaps Abram hoped that Lot had learned his lesson, living *like a stranger* in Sodom, and that he would return to him. Unfortunately, Lot had *not* learned his lesson, but returned *to Sodom soon after* his release as a prisoner of war. Undoubtedly, Abram also went to war because he had confidence in God's promises to him (12:2-3, 7).

⁵⁴⁹Conrad L'Heureux, "The Ugaritic and Biblical Rephaim," *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974):265-74.

⁵⁵⁰See *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Rephaim," by T. C. Mitchell.

⁵⁵¹Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 9:1:2; et al. See his description of it in *The Wars of the Jews*, 4:8:4.

"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."⁵⁵²

Some scholars have suggested that Abram's designation as "the Hebrew" (v. 13) marked him as a resident alien, rather than a semi-nomad. As such he would have taken steps to take possession of the land God had promised him.⁵⁵³ He could have been both.⁵⁵⁴ Albright argued that he was a "donkeyman, donkey driver, caravaner."⁵⁵⁵

In the eighteenth century B.C. the ass was the chief beast of burden."⁵⁵⁶

However, most conservative interpreters have concluded that he was a *semi-nomadic shepherd*.⁵⁵⁷ The term "Hebrew," occurring here for the first time in the Bible, is primarily an ethnic designation in the Old Testament.⁵⁵⁸ Usually people other than Hebrews used it to describe this ethnic group. It comes from the name "Eber" (cf. 10:21), and is related to a verb meaning "cross over" or "pass through." Abram "crossed over" or "passed through" from another place in order to obey the Lord's command.⁵⁵⁹

"The appearance of the later name 'Dan' [v. 14] is a post-Mosaic updating of the place name for later readers."⁵⁶⁰

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).

⁵⁵²Keil and Delitzsch, 1:202.

⁵⁵³See Donald J. Wiseman, "Abraham in History and Tradition. Part I: Abraham the Hebrew," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:534 (April-June 1977):123-30.

⁵⁵⁴See 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.

⁵⁵⁵Albright, "Abram . . .," p. 34.

⁵⁵⁶Idem, *The Archaeology . . .*, p. 206.

⁵⁵⁷E.g., Kitchen, *The Bible . . .*, p. 57. Cf. 46:32, 34; 47:3.

⁵⁵⁸Hamilton, p. 405. See Finegan, pp. 68-70, for discussion of the Habiru people.

⁵⁵⁹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 30.

⁵⁶⁰Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 147.

The lesson of both passages is the same: God is able to give a trusting and obedient minority victory over ungodly forces that are overwhelmingly superior in numbers.

Abram's meeting with two kings 14:17-24

This section records an important decision Abram had to make after he returned victoriously from his battle with the Mesopotamian kings.

- 14:17 The "valley of Shaveh" was near the city that later became Jerusalem (the "Salem" of verse 18). It may have been the Kidron (or "Black") Valley, immediately east of the city, or some other valley not far away.
- 14:18 "Melchizedek" was probably a title rather than a proper name. It means "King of Righteousness" or "My King is Righteous." Compare Adonizedek ("Lord of Righteousness") in Josh. 10:1, 3. 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.⁵⁶¹ The names of both the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 2) are compounds of a Hebrew word translated "evil" (cf. 13:13).

"The Rabbis have a curious conceit about the origin of the name Jerusalem, which is commonly taken to mean, 'the foundation,' 'the abode,' or 'the inheritance of peace.' They make it a compound of *Jireh* and *Shalem*, and say that Abraham called it 'Jehovah-Jireh,' while Shem had named it *Shalem*, but that God combined the two into Jireh-Shalem, Jerushalaim, or Jerusalem. (*Ber[akot]. R[abbah].*)"⁵⁶²

"Bread" and "wine" were the royal food and drink of the day. Many writers have commented on their typical significance, though there is no basis for connecting them directly with the elements used in the Lord's Supper. Many ancient Near Easterners used bread and wine in making covenants.⁵⁶³ 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.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶¹Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 316.

⁵⁶²Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 25.

⁵⁶³Donald J. Wiseman, "Abraham in History and Tradition. Part II: Abraham the Prince," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134:535 (July-September 1977):236.

⁵⁶⁴Loren Fisher, "Abraham and His Priest-King," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962):268.

- 14:19 Melchizedek "blessed" Abram, and so set himself up for God's blessing (cf. 12:3). The "God" whom Melchizedek worshipped as a priest was the true God, known to him as "El Elyon," meaning "Most High God, Possessor of Heaven and Earth" (i.e., the Creator) This title reveals the sovereign power of God over the nations. Both Melchizedek and Abram regarded Abram's recent victory in battle as due to the blessing of El Elyon (cf. v. 22). This shows that both of them worshipped the true, living God.
- 14:20 People commonly practiced tithing as an act of worship in the ancient Near East at this time (cf. 28:22).⁵⁶⁵ It was also a common tax. This is still true in some modern countries. For example, in England part of every person's taxes goes to maintain the Church of England. Some residents regard this part of their tax as their contribution to the church or their tithe. However, since Melchizedek gave Abram a priestly blessing, it is likely that Abram reciprocated by giving Melchizedek *a gift* with priestly connotations.⁵⁶⁶ In some cases, people gave tithes to those whom they regarded as superiors, as a sign of their respect.⁵⁶⁷ "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 prosperous victory. 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).

"The gifts of the ungodly are often attached to deadly strings."⁵⁶⁸

Generally, the patriarchs believed that God would give them what He had promised without their having to take it from others.⁵⁶⁹ Abram was content with what God had given him (cf. Phil. 4:11).⁵⁷⁰

". . . 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."⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁵See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:207.

⁵⁶⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 316.

⁵⁶⁷A. Noordtjz, *Leviticus*, p. 279.

⁵⁶⁸Davis, p. 182.

⁵⁶⁹See note on 48:22.

⁵⁷⁰See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 120-22, for an excursus on the patriarchs' wealth.

⁵⁷¹Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 318.

"Christians are really so rich in their own inheritance that it ill becomes them to crave the possessions of others."⁵⁷²

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."⁵⁷³

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews expounded the *typical* significance of Melchizedek, and the events of this incident, in Hebrews 7 (cf. Ps. 110:4). A "type" is a divinely intended pre-illustration of something else that follows: the antitype.

The confidence that God will preserve and provide for His own, *just as He promised*, should encourage believers to decline worldly benefits and wait for God's blessings.

5. The Abrahamic Covenant ch. 15

Abram, in so many words, 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: "What will you give me . . . since I am childless?" God graciously obliged him by formalizing the promises, and making a covenant. In the giving of the covenant, God symbolically let Abram know that enslavement would precede the fulfillment of the promise.

From chapters 12 through 14, issues involving God's promise to Abram concerning land have predominated. 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 a "great . . . reward." This was God's fourth revelation to Abram.

⁵⁷²Bush, 1:237.

⁵⁷³Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, pp. 321-22.

"Gen 15 not only stands at the center of the external structure of the Abraham narratives, but also is regarded in the history of exegesis right down to the present as the very heart of the Abraham story."⁵⁷⁴

"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."⁵⁷⁵

Moses' declaration that "Abram believed the LORD . . ." (v. 6) links the two sections.

15:1 "The word of the LORD came.' This is a phrase typically introducing revelation to a prophet, e.g., 1 Sam 15:10; Hos 1:1; but in Genesis it is found only here and in v 4 of this chapter. Abraham is actually called a prophet in 20:7. It prepares the way for the prophecy of the Egyptian bondage in vv 13-16."⁵⁷⁶

Only in 15:1, 22:1, and 22:11 did God address Abram directly. Visions were one of the three primary methods of divine revelation in the Old Testament, along with dreams and direct communications (cf. Num. 12:6-8).

"By his bold intervention and rescue of Lot, Abram exposes himself to the endemic plague of that region—wars of retaliation.⁵⁷⁷ 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."⁵⁷⁸

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.⁵⁷⁹ God would compensate Abram for conducting this military campaign, even though he had passed up a reward from the king of Sodom. The compensation in view consisted of *land* and *descendants* (cf. Ps. 127:3).

⁵⁷⁴Westermann, *Genesis 12—36*, p. 230.

⁵⁷⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 238.

⁵⁷⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, p. 32

⁵⁷⁷"See Sarna, [*Understanding Genesis*, pp.] 116, 121, 122."

⁵⁷⁸Helyer, p. 83.

⁵⁷⁹M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, p. 216.

15:2-3 Abram used a new title for God, calling Him "Master (Adonai) Yahweh" (translated "Lord God"; i.e., meaning "Sovereign LORD"). 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."⁵⁸⁰

The wordplay between the Hebrew words *mesheq* ("heir") and *dammeseq* ("Damascus") highlights the incongruity that Abram's presumed heir (Eliezer) would apparently be an alien (cf. Jer. 49:1).

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 (v. 2; cf. Prov. 17:2).

". . . 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."⁵⁸¹

God assured Abram that the descendants He had promised would come through a "natural-born son," not an adopted heir ("one . . . from your own body"; 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" (all believers after Abram), 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" (confidently trusted, relied upon), for which God "reckoned (it to) him righteous (as righteousness). In Hebrew the preformative conjunction *waw*, with the

⁵⁸⁰Hamilton, p. 420. See also Cyrus H. Gordon, "Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets," *Biblical Archaeologist* 3:1 (February 1940):2-3.

⁵⁸¹West, 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.

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 with a *hiphil* perfect, 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. Abram's normal response to God's words to him was to believe them. Abram had trusted the Person of God previously (cf. Heb. 11:8), but he evidently had not realized that God would give him an heir "from [his] own body" (v. 4). Now he accepted this promise of God also (cf. Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23). One writer suggested that Abram believed the "counting" promises of 13:16 and 15:4-5, regarding numerous descendants, and the result was that the Lord "counted" his faith as righteousness.⁵⁸²

"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.'"⁵⁸³

"Religious conversion appears first in recorded history in the Hebrew Bible."⁵⁸⁴

"Trust" in *God's promise* is what results in "justification"—in any era. The promises of God (content of faith) vary, but the object of faith does not. It is always God.⁵⁸⁵ 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.

Covenant theologians believe that the *object* of saving faith in both Testaments is the same: *Jesus Christ*.⁵⁸⁶ However, there does not seem to be enough specific revelation about Jesus Christ early in the Old Testament to justify such a conclusion.

Moses probably recorded Abram's *faith*, here, because it was foundational for making the Abrahamic Covenant. God made this covenant with a man who believed Him.

James 2:21 suggests that Abram was justified when he offered Isaac (ch. 22). James meant that Abram's work of willingly offering Isaac justified him (i.e., declared him righteous). His work manifested his

⁵⁸²Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 167.

⁵⁸³Boice, 2:98.

⁵⁸⁴Albright, *Archaeology and . . .*, p. 24.

⁵⁸⁵See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 110-31; or idem, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 105-22.

⁵⁸⁶See the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7:3, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3; Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 2:6:4; and Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Is It the Case that Christ is the Same Object of Faith in the Old Testament?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55:2(June 2012):291-98.

righteous condition. In Genesis 15, *God* declared Abram righteous (in standing before God), but in Genesis 22, *Abram's works* declared (testified; declared to others) that he was righteous.

"In the sacrifice of Isaac was shown the full meaning of the word (Gen. 15:6) spoken 30 . . . years before in commendation of Abraham's belief in the promise of a child. . . . It was the willing surrender of the child of promise, 'accounting that God was able to raise him up from the dead,' which fully proved his faith."⁵⁸⁷

15:8 Abram requested a *sign*, a supernatural verification that God would indeed fulfill the distant promise ("How may I know that I will possess it?"). 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."⁵⁸⁸

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."⁵⁸⁹

"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."⁵⁹⁰

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 in order 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."⁵⁹¹

"We suggest that the animal cutting in Gen. 15:9-10, 17 is designated a 'covenant ratification sacrifice' . . . The killing

⁵⁸⁷Joseph Mayor, *The Epistle of Saint James*, p. 104. Cf. Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, pp. 28-31.

⁵⁸⁸Davis, p. 186.

⁵⁸⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 152.

⁵⁹⁰Livingston, p. 157.

⁵⁹¹Gordon 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.

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."⁵⁹²

To "ratify" means to give formal consent to (a treaty, contract, or agreement), making it officially valid.

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."⁵⁹³

15:12 Abram fell into the same type of "deep sleep" that God brought on Adam when He took Adam's rib to make Eve (cf. 2:21). Abram's "terror" reflects his reaction to the flame that passed between the parts, and to the

⁵⁹²Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Meaning of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19 (1981):70.

⁵⁹³Wenham, "The Symbolism . . .," p. 135.

15:17

The "smoking oven" and "flaming torch" were one entity. This was an intensely bright, hot flame symbolizing *God in His holiness*. The *bright, hot, burning flame* is a good symbol of God in that: it is pure, purges in judgment, and provides light and warmth.

"This act is . . . a promise that God will be with Abraham's descendants (e.g. 26:3, 24; 28:15; 31:3; 46:4, etc.). Indeed the description of the theophany as a furnace of smoke and 'a torch of fire' invites comparison with the pillar of cloud and fire that was a feature of the wilderness wanderings, and especially with the smoke, fire and torches (Exod. 19:18; 20:18) that marked the law-giving at Sinai. These were visible tokens of God's presence with his people, that he was walking among them and that they were his people (Lev. 26:12).

"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).

"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. . . ."597

Another writer argued that this verse does not picture a covenant-making ritual for a unilateral, wholly unconditional covenant (cf. 17:1-2, 9-14; 18:18-19; 22:16, 18; 26:5). He believed the covenant is unconditional, but it did not become unconditional until chapter 22.⁵⁹⁸

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.⁵⁹⁹

"Note that the conditional promise of Gen. 12:1-3 becomes an unconditional covenant in Gen. 15:18. God declared His unconditional covenant with Abraham after declaring him righteous because of his belief (15:6)."⁶⁰⁰

". . . it is fitting that in many respects the account should foreshadow the making of the covenant at Sinai. The opening statement in 15:7: 'I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Ur of the Chaldeans,' is virtually identical to the opening statement of the Sinai covenant in Exodus 20:2: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' The expression 'Ur of the Chaldeans' refers back to Genesis 11:28, 31 and grounds the present covenant in a past act of divine salvation from 'Babylon,' just as Exodus 20:2 grounds the Sinai covenant in an act of divine salvation from Egypt. The coming of God's presence in the awesome fire and darkness of Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18; 20:18; Dt 4:11) appears to be intentionally reflected in Abraham's pyrotechnic vision (Ge 15:12, 17). In the Lord's words to Abraham (15:13-16) the connection between Abraham's covenant and the Sinai covenant is explicitly made by means of the reference to the four hundred years of bondage of Abraham's seed and their subsequent 'exodus' ('and after this they will go out,' v. 14). Such considerations lead to the conclusion that the author

⁵⁹⁷Wenham, "The Symbolism . . .," p. 136.

⁵⁹⁸Gordon H. Johnston, "Torch and Brazier Passing between the Pieces (Gen 15:17): Does It Really Symbolize an Unconditional Covenant?" and "God's Covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15: A Contingently-Unconditional Royal Grant?" papers presented at the 56th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, Tex., 18 November 2004.

⁵⁹⁹Westermann, "The Promises . . .," p. 690.

⁶⁰⁰*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1885.

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."⁶⁰¹

Moses revealed the general geographical borders of the Promised Land, here for the first time. Some scholars interpret the "river of Egypt" as the Nile River.

"The argument is usually based on the fact that the Hebrew word *nahar* is consistently restricted to large rivers. However, the Hebrew is more frequently *nahal* (= Arabic *wady*) instead of the *nahar* of Genesis 15:18 which may have been influenced by the second *nahar* in the text.⁶⁰² In the Akkadian texts of Sargon II (716 B.C.) it appears as *nahal musar*."⁶⁰³

God later specified the Wadi El 'Arish, "the geographical boundary between Canaan and Egypt,"⁶⁰⁴ 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.⁶⁰⁵ These borders appear to coincide with those of the Garden of Eden (cf. 2:10-14). Thus the Garden of Eden may have occupied the same general area as the Promised Land.

Some amillennialists take these boundaries as an ideal expressing great blessing, and they believe God never intended that Abram's seed should extend this far geographically.⁶⁰⁶ However, such a conclusion is subjective, and finds no support in the text.

⁶⁰¹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 152.

⁶⁰²J. Simons, *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament*, p. 96, sec. 272."

⁶⁰³James 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.

⁶⁰⁴Charles Pfeiffer and Howard Vos, *Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*, p. 88.

⁶⁰⁵Cf. Edersheim, *Sketches of . . .*, p. 8.

⁶⁰⁶E.g., Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 245.

15:19-21 Here Moses named ten of the native tribes then inhabiting the Promised Land. The longest of the 27 lists of pre-Israelite nations that inhabited the Promised Land name 12 entities (10:15-18a; 1 Chron. 1:13-18). Sometimes as few as two receive mention, and most of these lists identify six.⁶⁰⁷ "Canaanites" is both a general name for all these tribes (a *synecdoche*) and, as used 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).⁶⁰⁸ Again, the first readers of Genesis would have been greatly encouraged to read this promise (cf. vv. 13-14). God repeated the promises of this covenant frequently in Genesis (17:1-22; 18:1-15; 22:15-18; 26:23-24; 35:9-15; cf. 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17).

The Abrahamic Covenant is basic to the premillennial system of theology.

"How one understands the nature and function of this covenant will largely determine one's overall theology and most particularly his eschatology."⁶⁰⁹

This covenant has not yet been fulfilled as God promised it would be. Since God is faithful to His Word, 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—and He did—should we not expect that He will also fulfill the land promises *literally* as well?⁶¹⁰

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 writer 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.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁷Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 177.

⁶⁰⁸See Finegan, pp. 198–200.

⁶⁰⁹Eugene H. Merrill, "The Covenant with Abraham," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 12:36 (August 2008):5.

⁶¹⁰See Daniel C. Lane, "The Meaning and Use of the Old Testament Term for 'Covenant' (*berit*): with Some Implications for Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Toronto, Canada, 20 November 2002.

⁶¹¹See J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 1:54-55.

God's people can rely on His promises, even if they have to experience suffering and death before they see the promises fulfilled.⁶¹²

6. The birth of Ishmael ch. 16

Sarai and Abram schemed to obtain the heir God had promised to give them, by resorting to an albeit *culturally* acceptable custom of their day, but which involved a failure to trust God. This fleshly act created serious complications for Abram and his household, that included Hagar fleeing into the wilderness. Nevertheless God proved faithful to His promises and responded to Hagar's cries for help. He provided for her needs, and promised her many descendants—through Ishmael, since he was Abram's son.

"The account of Sarah's plan to have a son has not only been connected with the list of nations in chapter 15, but also appears to have been intentionally shaped with reference to the account of the Fall in Genesis 3. Each of the main verbs (*wayyiqtol* forms) and key expressions in 16:2-3 finds a parallel in Genesis 3."⁶¹³

Alluding to the Fall, which the above quotation points out, implies the writer's disapproval of what Sarai did (cf. 3:17). He continued to focus increasing attention on the problem of an heir. Sarai had borne Abram no children (v. 1). She therefore concocted a plan to obtain an heir from "[his] own body" (15:4). It looked as if everything would work out well until a conflict developed between Sarai and Hagar (v. 4). This conflict grew into a major crisis when Hagar fled the family encampment pregnant with Abram's unborn child (v. 6). Yahweh intervened again to resolve the crisis (v. 7). He instructed Hagar to return to Sarai (v. 9). Thus Hagar bore Ishmael in Abram's house, but later God revealed that he would not be the heir.

Sarai and Hagar 16:1-6

Using a woman other than one's wife (v. 2) was a method—apart from adoption—of providing an heir in the case of a childless marriage.⁶¹⁴ Hagar was Sarai's personal servant ("maid"), 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

⁶¹²See 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.

⁶¹³Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 153. See this page for a chart of the parallels.

⁶¹⁴Speiser, p. 130; T. Frymer-Kensky, "Patriarchal Family Relationships and Near Eastern Law," *Biblical Archaeologist* 44 (1981):209-14.

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."⁶¹⁵

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.⁶¹⁶ 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.'"⁶¹⁷

Not only was using a concubine an option, but in Hurrian culture, husbands sometimes required that if their wife could not bear children, it was then her *duty* to provide a concubine for him.⁶¹⁸

". . . any child of the bond-slave would necessarily belong to the mistress, not the mother."⁶¹⁹

This custom helps explain why Abram was so willing to be a part of Sarai's plan, that seems very unusual to us in the West. Abram agreed to his wife's faithless suggestion, just as Adam had followed Eve's lead. Abram's passivity contrasts with his earlier valiant action to save Lot from his captors (ch. 14). Like Eve, Sarai also blamed someone else for the results of her act, namely, Abram ("May the wrong done me be upon you. . . . May the Lord judge between you and me"; v. 5).

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.⁶²⁰ 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 to bear one's children was a custom of the day, it was never God's desire (2:24; Matt. 19:4-5). Abram and Sarai here repeated the failure of Adam and Eve, namely, doubting God's word. This episode ended in total

⁶¹⁵Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 7.

⁶¹⁶Bush, 1:258.

⁶¹⁷West, p. 69.

⁶¹⁸Livingston, p. 152. Cf. Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):245.

⁶¹⁹Thomas, p. 147. Cf. J. Cheryl Exum, "The Mothers of Israel: The Patriarchal Narrative from a Feminist Perspective," *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1986):64.

⁶²⁰E.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.

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."⁶²¹

Sarai tried to control the will of God by seizing the initiative from God (cf. 3:17). She and Abram chose fleshly means of obtaining the promised heir, rather than waiting for God in faith (cf. 25:21).⁶²² 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."⁶²³

The Angel of the LORD and Hagar 16:7-14

This is the first of 48 references to "the angel of the LORD" in the Old Testament. Sometimes, as here, "The Angel of the LORD" is deity, and in other places, he appears to be an angelic messenger from the Lord.

"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."⁶²⁴

This prophecy was not an insult or a curse. Ishmael would enjoy the freedom that his mother sought. 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. This may be the only instance in Scripture of a human being conferring a name on God.

Abram and Sarai's presumptuous and manipulative "solution" proved to be a source of much difficulty for everyone involved (cf. Abram's error in going to Egypt, 12:11-13). God, however, took care of and blessed Ishmael even though he was the fruit of Abram's presumption. This was another occasion when Abram did not trust God as he should have (cf. 12:10-20).

"Both Hagar and Mary [the mother of Jesus] stand as examples of women who obediently accepted God's word and thereby brought blessing to descendants too many to count."⁶²⁵

⁶²¹Bush, 1:259. See also Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 339.

⁶²²See George Van Pelt Campbell, "Rushing Ahead of God: An Exposition of Genesis 16:1-16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:651 (July-September 2006):276-91.

⁶²³Don Anderson, *Abraham: Delay Is Not Denial*, p. 93.

⁶²⁴Davis, p. 189. Cf. Jer. 2:24; Hos. 8:9.

⁶²⁵Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 13.

Paul wrote that this story contains (not is) an *allegory* (Gal. 4:24). An "allegory" today means a story without factual basis. Paul did not deny the factuality of Genesis 16, but he used this story as the basis for a comparison. "Illustration" or "comparison" would be better words to use to describe an analogy. 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).

There is much irony in this story: *Barren* Sarai lived in a *fertile* land, whereas *fertile* Hagar ended up living in a *barren* land. Furthermore the Egyptians, to whom the persecuted Hagar fled for freedom, later enslaved the persecutor, represented by Sarai's descendants.

Resorting to fleshly means, rather than waiting for God to provide what He has promised, always creates problems. This story also shows that human failure, ultimately, does not frustrate God's plans.

"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."⁶²⁶

When in great or in any kind of distress, people should *always pray*, because God is aware of their needs—and will fulfill His promises to them.

The birth of Ishmael 16:15-16

When Ishmael was finally born, Abram named him as God had directed (v. 11). Ishmael was born 12 years after God had first promised that Abram would have descendants (12:2, 7); at that time Abram was "86 years old." Now it appeared that Ishmael would be the promised "heir," but God had someone else in mind for Abram.

7. The sign of circumcision ch. 17

The Lord confirmed His covenant with Abram, 13 years after Ishmael's birth, by reiterating the promises of descendants and land—and by commanding Abram to circumcise all the males in his household. *Circumcision* thereby became the physical demonstration (sign) of the obedient faith of Abram and his descendants. There 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). 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 (descendants) as He had promised.

⁶²⁶Thomas, p. 149.

"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."⁶²⁷

There are in fact five divine speeches: vv. 1b-2, 4-8, 9-14, 15-16, and 19-21. The third speech comprises the center of the chiasmic structure of this chapter, which may also be read as two parallel panels, namely, 1-14 and 15-27.

"The chapter is more of a theological treatise than the typical Abraham story . . ."⁶²⁸

Abram undoubtedly assumed that *Ishmael* would be the promised heir—until God told him that Sarai would bear his heir "herself" ("a son *by her*," emphasis added; v. 16). That revelation is the most important feature of this chapter. God gave the name changes and circumcision, both to confirm the covenant promise of an heir and to strengthen Abram's faith.

17:1-8 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, which was the Covenant of Circumcision (vv. 2, 9, 10, 13, 14; cf. Acts 7:8). Thus Moses used the word "covenant" with two different references here, though throughout, the Abrahamic Covenant is in view.⁶²⁹ Perhaps visualizing the Covenant of Circumcision as a smaller circle, within the larger circle of the Abrahamic Covenant, will help. 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.

⁶²⁷Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 16.

⁶²⁸Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 199.

⁶²⁹For refutation of the view that God made more than one covenant with Abraham, see Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "God's Covenant with Abraham," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:2 (June 2013):249-71.

God also gave Abram and Sarai the added assurance, that they would have a multitude of descendants, by changing their names.⁶³⁰ He changed the name "Abram" ("High" or "Exalted Father") to "Abraham" ("Father of a Multitude"), and he changed the name "Sarai" ("My Princess" [perhaps a reference to her noble descent]) to "Sarah" ("Royal Princess" [from whom kings would come, v. 16]). Abraham's name emphasized the *number* or *vastness* 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."⁶³¹

Circumcision was "an everlasting covenant" (v. 7) because it marked the eternal salvation of the person who believed God as Abraham did, not because God wanted people to practice it for all of human history.⁶³² God, for instance, 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 lieu 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. Undoubtedly there are parallels between circumcision and baptism, nevertheless God did not intend baptism to replace circumcision. God *did* command circumcision of the Israelites in the Mosaic Law, but He has *not* commanded it of Christians. We do not live under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 4:10-13; 6:14-15; 7:1-4; 10:4).

17:9-14 God wanted Abraham to circumcise his *male servants* ("every male . . . who is born in your house or is bought with your money"), not just his children ("of your [seed]") and his grandchildren. The reason for this was that the Abrahamic Covenant would affect all who had a relationship with Abraham. Consequently they needed to bear the sign of that covenant. The person who refused circumcision was "cut off" (excommunicated or worse) from his people (v. 14), because by refusing it he was repudiating God's promises to Abraham.

⁶³⁰See note on 1:4.

⁶³¹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 157.

⁶³²Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 203.

"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."⁶³³

There are two main views as to the meaning of being "cut off" from Israel. Some scholars hold that it means *excommunication* from the covenant community and its benefits.⁶³⁴ However, there is also evidence that points to *execution*, sometimes by the Israelites, but usually by God, in the form of premature death.⁶³⁵ The threat of being "cut off" hung over the Israelite offender, just like the threat of getting 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; females did not. In the patriarchal society of the ancient Near East, people considered that a girl or woman *shared* the circumcised condition of her father if she was single, or her husband if she was married.

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.
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 brand 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.⁶³⁶ By commanding it of Abraham and his household, God was giving further evidence that He would bless the patriarch. Circumcision has hygienic value. One evidence

⁶³³Hamilton, p. 473.

⁶³⁴J. 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.

⁶³⁵Keil 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.

⁶³⁶See Davis, p. 192; Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 23-24; and J. Sasson, "Circumcision in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966):473-76.

of this is that cancer of the penis has a much higher incidence in uncircumcised males.⁶³⁷ Circumcision was a rite of passage to adulthood in these cultures.⁶³⁸ Normally it had been practiced on young adults only (cf. ch. 34). Circumcising *infants* was something new.

"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."⁶³⁹

"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

⁶³⁷Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September 1990):276.

⁶³⁸Kidner, p. 174.

⁶³⁹Fawver and Overstreet, p. 277.

recommended that the best day to circumcise a newborn was the eighth day of life.⁶⁴⁰

Another writer saw the eighth day as symbolic of completing a cycle of time corresponding to the Creation.⁶⁴¹

17:15-21 Abraham's "laugh" (v. 17) may have expressed his incredulity, but it could just as easily have been a joyful response to God's promise.⁶⁴² Sarah's *laugh* (18:15) seems to have arisen from a spirit of unbelief. God did not criticize Abraham for laughing in wonder, but He did rebuke Sarah when she laughed in doubt.

17:22-27 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).

This fifth revelation from God advanced God's promises in six particulars:

1. Part of God's blessing would depend on Abraham's maintaining the Covenant of Circumcision, though the Abrahamic Covenant as a whole did not depend on this (vv. 1-2).
2. Many nations would come from Abraham (vv. 4-6).
3. The Abrahamic Covenant would be "everlasting" (vv. 7-8).
4. God would be the God of Abraham's descendants in a special relationship (vv. 7-8).
5. Sarah *herself* would give birth to the promised heir (v. 16).
6. This is also the first time God identified the Promised Land as "Canaan" by name (v. 8).

"Abraham's experiences should teach us that natural law [barrenness] is no barrier to the purposes and plans for [*sic*] God."⁶⁴³

"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)."⁶⁴⁴

"Blameless" does not mean *sinless*, but "with integrity," or "wholeness of relationship" (with God; cf. 6:9). God requires a sanctified life of those who anticipate His promised blessings.

⁶⁴⁰L. Holt Jr. and R. McIntosh, *Holt Pediatrics*, pp. 125-26.

⁶⁴¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 261.

⁶⁴²See Raymond L. Cox, "What Made Abraham Laugh?" *Eternity* (November 1975), pp. 19-20.

⁶⁴³Davis, p. 193.

⁶⁴⁴Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 160.

8. Yahweh's visit to Abraham 18:1-15

Chapters 18 and 19 constitute one integrated story, but we shall consider this episode in the Abraham narrative section by section. Like the Flood story, it has a chiasmic structure, this time focusing on the announcement of the destruction of Sodom (19:12-13).⁶⁴⁵ Again there is a mass destruction, with only one man and his family escaping. Both stories end with the father's intoxication, and shameful treatment of the father by his children, that have consequences for future generations.⁶⁴⁶

We can perceive the Lord's gracious initiative, that He extended toward Abraham, in His visit to eat and commune with the patriarch "under the tree" outside 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, but they are not. Chapter 18 contributes the following:

1. It records another "promised heir" revelation (the sixth), this one in which God identified, for the first time, exactly 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*—in spite of apparently impossible circumstances (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 loveless squalor which is even uglier than the great overthrow of the cities."⁶⁴⁷

"There is also a blatant contrast between how Abraham hosted his visitors (ch. 18) and how the Sodomites hosted the same delegation (ch. 19)."⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁵See Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 41, for the chiasm.

⁶⁴⁶See *ibid.*, pp. 43-44; and Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 212-13; for more parallels.

⁶⁴⁷Kidner, p. 131.

⁶⁴⁸Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18—50*, p. 5.

- 18:1 Abraham was living near Hebron at this time ("the oaks of Mamre"; cf. 13:18).
- 18:2 The "three men" were "the LORD" (the Angel of Yahweh, vv. 13, 17, 20, 33) plus "two angels" (19:1; 18:22); the two angels later visited Lot. If Abraham had previously met the Angel of the Lord it seems likely that he would have recognized Him at once (cf. 17:1, 22). If he had not, Abraham definitely became aware of who this Angel was during this 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 "to herself," which the LORD nevertheless heard, sprang from a spirit of unbelief, due to long disappointment, as is clear from the Lord's response to it ("Is anything too difficult for the LORD?"; v. 14). Abraham's laugh (17:17) did not draw such a response.
- 18:13 The fact that the Lord knew Sarah had laughed, and knew her thoughts, demonstrated His *omniscience* to Abraham and Sarah. This would have strengthened their faith in what He told them.
- 18:14 The Lord's rhetorical question, one of the great statements of Scripture, reminded the elderly couple of His supernatural power, and fortified their faith further (cf. Jer. 32:17, 27).
- 18:15 Sarah evidently "denied" that she had laughed, either from fear of the Lord's power or from fear of offending Him. Again, God built confidence in His word. If the Lord could read Sarah's thoughts, could He not also open her womb?

Believers should never doubt God's promises, because *nothing is impossible* for Him.

9. Abraham's intercession for Lot 18:16-33

After God reviewed the reasons for sharing His plans for the destruction of Sodom with Abraham, He told the patriarch that He was about to investigate the wicked condition of that city. This news moved Abraham to ask God to be just in His dealings ("deal justly," fairly, v. 25) with "the righteous" there.

"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."⁶⁴⁹

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*. "Righteousness and justice" (v. 19) may be a *hendiadys* meaning "genuine righteousness" (cf. Mic. 3:1; 4:8). "I will go down" (v. 21) is another *anthropomorphism*, this one emphasizing God's omniscience (cf. Ps. 113:4-6).

"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. . . ."⁶⁵⁰

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 Gomorrah]. 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."⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁵⁰Thomas, pp. 161-62.

⁶⁵¹Robert 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. Abraham "prayed" (interceded directly to God) 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, in the end, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? Some interpreters believe he did not, because he *quit too soon*:

". . . Abraham ceased asking before God ceased giving."⁶⁵²

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 indeed 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 just how merciful God would be in judging these cities.

Why did Abraham stop with "10 . . . righteous" people (v. 32)? Perhaps he had learned that the Lord would be merciful regardless of the number.⁶⁵³ Perhaps he thought there would be *at least* "10 righteous" in those two cities. If so, he underestimated the *wickedness* of the Sodomites, and, perhaps, he overestimated "righteous" Lot's influence over his neighbors.

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. A godly minority 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 (cf. Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:9, 15).

⁶⁵²Ibid., p. 116. See also Chris Wright, "Intercession or Irritation?" *Third Way* 29 (February 1983):18-19.

⁶⁵³Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 230.

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—sixfold—gives his request even more solemnity and weight.

This chapter illustrates a progression in Abraham's relationship with God, which 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."⁶⁵⁴

The outstanding lesson of this section is, most likely, that since God is a righteous Judge, He will not destroy the righteous with the wicked.⁶⁵⁵

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)."⁶⁵⁶

"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."⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁴Davis, p. 199.

⁶⁵⁵See 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.

⁶⁵⁶Helyer, p. 84.

⁶⁵⁷Kidner, 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."⁶⁵⁸

The traditional site of Sodom is near the south bay of the Dead Sea. Many scholars still support this location.⁶⁵⁹

19:1-11 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).⁶⁶⁰ 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. Lot considered his duty to his guests (hospitality) of greater importance than his duty to his children (fatherhood, protecting his children).

"When a man took in a stranger, he was bound to protect him, even at the expense of the host's life."⁶⁶¹

The moral blindness of the Sodomites led to their spiritual blindness, and even to *physical* "blindness" (v. 11; cf. 2 Kings 6:18).

19:12-22 "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]."⁶⁶²

The rescue of Lot and his family was due ultimately to the Lord's mercy ("compassion"; v. 16).

⁶⁵⁸Davis, p. 200.

⁶⁵⁹E.g., David Howard Jr., "Sodom and Gomorrah Revisited," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27:4 (December 1984):385-400. On the location of Sodom and Gomorrah, see "Cities of the Dead Sea Plain," *Buried History* 18:3 (September 1982), pp. 35-48; 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.

⁶⁶⁰For 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.

⁶⁶¹Davis, p. 201. See Desmond Alexander, "Lot's Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104:2 (June 1985):289-91.

⁶⁶²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 170.

"This is the whole point of the story. God could have destroyed the city of Sodom with no word to Lot or Abraham (18:17). But because of God's mercy, His angels grabbed Lot and his family and brought them forcefully to safety."⁶⁶³

"Zoar" (v. 22) means "insignificant (in size)" (cf. v. 20).

19:23-26 Joesphus wrote that God sent a thunderbolt to set the city on fire (v. 24).⁶⁶⁴ Probably the burning sodium sulfate ("brimstone and fire") that was raining down was what covered Lot's wife while she was lingering behind, and which turned her into a "pillar of salt" (v. 26).⁶⁶⁵

"The heaven's rain cannot be explained solely as a natural phenomenon, such as earthquake; it was exceptional, never again repeated, providing the parade illustration of the fiery eschatological judgment against the wicked (e.g., 2 Pet 2:6-9). The twin calamities of Noah and Lot illustrate Jesus' teaching on the suddenness of the coming of the Son of Man (Luke 17:26-30)."⁶⁶⁶

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 the very trials that He uses to punish the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:6-10). John called believers to not love the world, or the things in the world—because they will "pass away" (1 John 2:15-17).

19:27-29 As in the Flood story, the writer focused the reader's attention on the response of individuals to the judgment, rather than on the destruction itself. Here those individuals are Lot's wife and Abraham. Later they will be Lot and his daughters. The picture of Abraham, in verses 27-28, standing on the mountain, interceding "before the LORD," and "looking down," is similar to that of Moses, interceding for Israel in the battle with the Amalekites (Exod. 17:11-12).⁶⁶⁷ Lot's "prayer" request of the two angels, concerning "Zoar" (vv. 18-20), contrasts greatly with Abraham's prayer for Sodom (18:23-32).

"The substitution of Abraham for Lot in this sentence ["God remembered Abraham," v. 29; cf. 8:1] makes an

⁶⁶³*The Nelson . . .*, p. 40.

⁶⁶⁴Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 1:11:4.

⁶⁶⁵Kidner, p. 135. See Deborah Aufenson-Vance, "Lot's Wife Remembers," *Adventist Review* 163:8 (Feb. 20, 1986), p. 5.

⁶⁶⁶Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 241.

⁶⁶⁷Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 173.

important theological point. Lot was not saved on his own merits but through Abraham's intercession."⁶⁶⁸

Abraham rescued Lot twice: from the Mesopotamian kings (ch. 14) and from Sodom.

19:30-38 Moses evidently included the account of Lot's incest for at least two reasons:

1. This story explains the origin of the Moabite and Ammonite nations—that played major roles in the later history of Israel as inveterate enemies. "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)."⁶⁶⁹

2. This story also illuminates the degrading effect that living in Sodom had on Lot's daughters. The writer censured Lot's daughters by not naming them (cf. Ruth 4:1). Lot's older daughter was so desperate to marry, that she exaggerated the effects of the recent catastrophe (v. 31), in order to, at least according to her way of thinking, "preserve the family [line] through [their] father."

"Lot was able to take his daughters out of Sodom, but he was not able to take . . . Sodom out of his daughters."⁶⁷⁰

"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."⁶⁷¹

"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

⁶⁶⁸Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 59.

⁶⁶⁹Kidner, p. 136. See also Henry O. Thompson, "The Biblical Ammonites," *Bible and Spade* 11:1 (Winter 1982):1-14.

⁶⁷⁰Davis, p. 206.

⁶⁷¹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 61-62.

influences our lives. For this and many other reasons the New Testament constantly implores the believer to fellowship with those of like precious faith."⁶⁷²

"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."⁶⁷³

"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."⁶⁷⁴

"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)."⁶⁷⁵

From 2 Peter 2:6-9, we know that Lot was a "righteous" man, though from the record of him in Genesis, we might doubt that. He chose to live as, what the New Testament calls, a "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

⁶⁷²Davis, p. 207.

⁶⁷³Thomas, p. 171.

⁶⁷⁴George W. Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, p. 147.

⁶⁷⁵Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 174.

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!

A major revelation of this chapter is that it is foolish for a believer to become attached to the things of this world. They will corrupt him, 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 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."⁶⁷⁶

The writer composed chapter 20 as another chiasm, with the focal point being Abimelech warning his servants (v. 8). Two dialogues constitute the main parts of the story: the one between God and Abimelech (vv. 3-7) and the one between Abimelech and Abraham (vv. 9-13).

"The focus of the narrative of chapters 20 and 21 is on the relationship between Abraham and the nations. Abraham's role is that of a prophetic intercessor, as in the promise 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (12:3). He prayed for the Philistines (20:7), and God healed them (v. 17). In the narrative Abimelech plays the role of a 'righteous Gentile' with whom Abraham could live in peace and blessing. There is, then, an implied contrast in the narratives between chapters 19 (Lot, the one who pictures the mixed multitude) and 20 (Abimelech, the righteous sojourner)."⁶⁷⁷

Abraham again misrepresented his relationship with Sarah, calling her his "sister" (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 "in a dream" about who Sarah was, and instructed him: to "restore" Sarah to her husband, to make restitution to Abraham, and to ask Abraham the "prophet" to intercede with God ("pray") 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

⁶⁷⁶Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 284.

⁶⁷⁷Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 161.

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."⁶⁷⁸

". . . 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."⁶⁷⁹

Abraham, naturally, moved frequently since he had to find pasture for his flocks and herds (v. 1). He lived a semi-nomadic life.

". . . his house and family remained at Gerar while he was down in Sinai . . ."⁶⁸⁰

"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."⁶⁸¹

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 specified (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). In contrast to the Sodomites, this community responded to God's warnings.

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.

"The term indicates more a relationship to God than an ability to speak for Him. Abraham's relationship to God was the basis for God's command that Sarah be restored to her husband."⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁸Helyer, p. 84.

⁶⁷⁹Kidner, p. 137.

⁶⁸⁰Albright, "Abram the . . .," p. 48.

⁶⁸¹Wenham, *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.

⁶⁸²*The Nelson . . .*, p. 42.

Other ancient Near Eastern texts refer to adultery as a "great sin" and a "great crime," reflecting the seriousness of this offense in the eyes of society.⁶⁸³

"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."⁶⁸⁴

"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."⁶⁸⁵

Fear for his safety evidently led Abraham to act as he did *this second time*, even though his previous deception in Egypt had been unsuccessful. Even the repeated promises of God did not drive out the fear of potential danger from Abraham's heart. God used a *pagan king* to rebuke the righteous prophet—who had just recently boldly pleaded for Sodom—when Abraham's faith failed.

This incident shows and contrasts God's *faithfulness* to Abraham as 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 will maintain His covenant and fulfill His promises, in spite of the opposition and interference of influential and powerful individuals.

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, Isaac, and consequently Abraham sent Ishmael 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 God's faithfulness and power, both in keeping His promise, and in miraculously providing an heir through Sarah ("So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham . . . at the appointed time . . . God had spoken (predicted) to him"; 17:16; 18:14). Note the threefold repetition: "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.

⁶⁸³See *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1992 ed., s.v. "Adultery," by E. A. Goodfreind.

⁶⁸⁴Keil and Delitzsch, 1:242.

⁶⁸⁵Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 175.

God "visited" Sarah (v. 1, NIV), a common metaphor that describes God's intervention in nature and human affairs. 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 caused Hannah to conceive (1 Sam. 2:21), and when He brought the Jewish exiles home from the Babylonian Captivity (Jer. 29:10). Thus this word's presence here highlights the major significance of Isaac's birth.

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).⁶⁸⁶

The expulsion of Ishmael and God's care of him and Hagar 21:8-21

All was not well in Abraham's household, even though God had provided the heir. Ishmael was a potential rival to Isaac's inheritance. This section records another crisis in the story of Abraham's heir. Waltke pointed out six parallels between Hagar and Ishmael's trek, and Abraham and Isaac's (ch. 22).⁶⁸⁷

Normally in ancient Near Eastern culture, 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. Weaning would normally have occurred at age two or three (cf. 1 Sam. 1:22-24; Hos. 1:8). 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 in Hebrew, indicating that Ishmael was not simply "laughing," but cruelly ridiculing Isaac (cf. Gal. 4:29). Ishmael *disdained* Isaac, like Hagar had "despised" Sarai (16:4). Abraham, understandably, felt distressed by this situation, since he loved both Ishmael and Isaac (cf. 17:18).

"But even in that culture it was reprehensible to send Ishmael away. When a surrogate wife had borne a son to one's husband, that mother and child could not be dismissed even if the first wife subsequently gave birth to a son. This partly explains Abraham's reluctance to do what Sarah demanded (v. 11)."⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁶On 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.

⁶⁸⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 292.

⁶⁸⁸*The Nelson . . .*, p. 43.

God appeared to Abraham again (the seventh revelation), to assure him 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."⁶⁸⁹

For other instances where God apparently commanded divorce, see Deuteronomy 21:10-14 and Ezra 9—10. Since God makes the rules, He can also alter them according to His sovereign will.

"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."⁶⁹⁰

The "laws of Lipit-Ishtar" were laws that governed life in Mesopotamia that antedated the Mosaic Law.

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."⁶⁹¹

The concluding description of Ishmael's experiences (vv. 14-21) provides essential information to understanding and appreciating later references to him and his descendants in the text: "I will make a great nations of him . . . and he lived in the wilderness of Paran." Ishmael became the father of 12 sons (25:13-16), as also Jacob did. From Ishmael's sons came the Arab nations, that have *ever since* been the chief antagonists of the Israelites. The term "Arab" (someone from Arabia) came into use for the first time in the ninth century B.C.⁶⁹² 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."⁶⁹³

"The picture of Ishmael as the rejected son is complete: he is the son of a slave woman, married to an Egyptian, lives outside normal social bounds, and is remembered for his hostilities."⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁸⁹Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4 (December 1997):535.

⁶⁹⁰Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 147.

⁶⁹¹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 81.

⁶⁹²Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 156.

⁶⁹³Leupold, 2:609.

⁶⁹⁴Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 274.

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. See Paul's use of this account in Galatians 4:21-31.

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)."⁶⁹⁵

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 (a treaty) with him. This treaty enabled Abraham to live, serve, and worship God freely, without worry or threat from his neighbors, 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), but also to record Abraham's strong testimony to God's faithfulness (vv. 32-33). Furthermore it sets the stage for Isaac's dealings with Abimelech (ch. 26).

Since Abraham had become a powerful individual in the land, by God's blessing, King Abimelech initiated a bilateral treaty with him for *his own* protection. This was evidently the same King "Abimelech" that Abraham had dealt with previously (ch. 20). They made a "parity" covenant (i.e., between "equals," vv. 31-32). This is the first of several parity covenants in Genesis (cf. 26:28; 31:43-45). This covenant treaty was a remarkable admission of Abraham's standing and blessing by God, and an expression of Abimelech's confidence in the future existence of the patriarch's family.

The birth of Isaac seems to have produced a much stronger faith in Abraham (cf. v. 14). Note Abraham's immediate response, from then on, to God's instructions to him (cf. 22:3).

"Phicol" (v. 22) seems to have been a title rather than a proper name, probably of Anatolian origin.⁶⁹⁶

Wells were extremely important in the life of semi-nomads like Abraham (v. 25).⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 298.

⁶⁹⁶On 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.

⁶⁹⁷See Clark Youngblood, "Wells," *Biblical Illustrator* (Fall 1986), pp. 41-49.

"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).⁶⁹⁸

Critics of the historicity of the patriarchal narratives have pointed out that references of "the Philistines" in Genesis (vv. 32, 34; 26:1) show 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 were *warlike*, perhaps the same name describes an earlier but entirely different race of people. They may have resembled the later thirteenth-century Philistines, who also emigrated from the Aegean area into Palestine.⁶⁹⁹ Or, to consider another possibility, perhaps the Philistines of 2000 B.C. were *Minoan* and thus peaceful, whereas those of 1200 were *Mycenean* and thus warlike.⁷⁰⁰

"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.)."⁷⁰¹

"Biblical historical data are accurate to an extent far surpassing the ideas of any modern critical students, who have consistently tended to err on the side of hypercriticism."⁷⁰²

By planting a tree, Abraham indicated his determination to stay in that region. "Tamarisk" trees (v. 33) were long-lived and evergreen.⁷⁰³ This tree was an appropriate symbol of the enduring grace of the faithful God, whom Abraham now recognized as "the Everlasting God" (*El Olam*). Abraham now owned the first, small part—like a first installment—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."⁷⁰⁴

In contrast to Abraham's earlier fear of Abimelech (ch. 20), we now see him boldly standing up to this powerful king. His changed attitude evidently resulted from God's *grace* in blessing the patriarch as He had promised.

⁶⁹⁸See William G. Dever, "Beersheba," *Biblical Illustrator* (Spring 1983), pp. 56-62.

⁶⁹⁹Kitchen, *Ancient Orient . . .*, p. 80; Edward E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament*, pp. 94-95.

⁷⁰⁰Barker, p. 134. See also Vassos Karageorghis, "Exploring Philistine Origins on the Island of Cyprus," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10:2 (March-April 1984):16-28.

⁷⁰¹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 94.

⁷⁰²Albright, *The Archaeology . . .*, p. 229.

⁷⁰³Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 282.

⁷⁰⁴Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 94.

"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."⁷⁰⁵

Peaceful interpersonal relationships with those who acknowledge God enable the believer to proclaim his or her faith freely (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-4).

14. The sacrifice of Isaac 22:1-19

In obedience to God's command, Abraham took his *promised heir* to "the land of Moriah" to sacrifice him to the Lord. Because Abraham was *willing* to slay *his* "only begotten son," God graciously restrained him from killing Isaac, and promised to bless him further for his obedience. Abraham memorialized the place by calling it: "The LORD Will Provide."

God called on Abraham to make five great sacrifices: his native country, his extended family, his nephew Lot, his son Ishmael, and his son Isaac. Each sacrifice involved something naturally dear to Abraham, but each resulted in greater blessings from God.

This story also demonstrates the strong confidence that Abraham had in God at this time. He believed that "God [was] able to raise [Isaac] even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19). This is why he was willing to slay him. Jewish tradition refers to this chapter as the Akedah, from the Hebrew word *wayya'aqod*, translated "bound," in verse 9.⁷⁰⁶

"With this chapter we reach the climax of the faith life of Abraham—the supreme test and the supreme victory."⁷⁰⁷

"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."⁷⁰⁸

22:1-8 This incident took place some time after the events recorded in the chapters immediately preceding this one, evidently several years later.

⁷⁰⁵Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 177.

⁷⁰⁶See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 300–306.

⁷⁰⁷Leupold, 2:616. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 99, 112. This writer also noted parallels between chapters 21 and 22 on pp. 99-100.

⁷⁰⁸Helyer, pp. 84-85.

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."⁷⁰⁹

The Hebrew text says that "the God" tested Abraham (v. 1). The presence of the definite article before "God" underlines the fact that it was *the true God*, Genuine Deity, who made this request, not a false god or a demon (cf. 41:32). The true God was testing Abraham's *love* for Himself, and not simply his faith (v. 2). Such testing (Heb. *nsh*) shows what someone is really like, and it usually involves difficulty or hardship (cf. Exod. 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2, 16; 13:3; Judg. 2:22; 3:1, 4; 1 Kings 10:1; Dan. 1:12, 14).

"This scene presents the radical nature of true faith: tremendous demands and incredible blessings."⁷¹⁰

"The . . . best approach to the passage is that God commanded an actual human sacrifice and Abraham intended to obey Him fully."⁷¹¹

The "land of Moriah" (lit. "Where the LORD Provides" or "Where the LORD Appears") was the mountainous country around Jerusalem. This area was located about 45 miles north of Beersheba. "Moriah" was probably the name the Israelites gave this area after this event. On these mountains, God's angel later appeared to David, who built an altar to the Lord (2 Sam. 24:16-25). Here also, Solomon built his temple (2 Chron. 3:1), and Jesus Christ died. A mountain was a suitable place for Abraham to meet God (cf. v. 14).⁷¹²

Verses 1 and 2 relate a second time God called Abraham, that parallels the the first call in 12:1-3, in which He told Abraham to leave his home to go to another place.

"The repetition of these motifs forms an inclusio in the narrative structure of the Abrahamic narrative, pointing out the complete cycle in the patriarch's experience. The allusion to the former call would also have prompted obedience to the present one, in many ways a more difficult journey in God's direction."⁷¹³

⁷⁰⁹Thomas, p. 195.

⁷¹⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 301.

⁷¹¹Davis, p. 217.

⁷¹²See Appendix 4 at the end of these notes for an article about Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

⁷¹³Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 394. Cf. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 283.

The Lord was not asking Abraham to make any greater sacrifices to Him, the true God, than his pagan neighbors were willing to make to their false gods. Canaanite religion involved child sacrifice, but we do not know for sure that the Canaanites practiced it as early as Abraham's time.⁷¹⁴

"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."⁷¹⁵

Abraham probably told his servants to "stay" behind (v. 5)—so they would not try to restrain him from killing Isaac. The three verbs that Abraham used (v. 5) are all intensive in Hebrew (cf. 12:2): "We *are determined* to go," "We *are determined* to worship," and "We *are determined* to return." The words used to describe Isaac in this chapter, as well as what Moses said of him, indicate that he was probably a young man at this time (v. 6). Josephus said he was 25 years old.⁷¹⁶

"There are indications to suggest that the meaning of *Abba* in Mark 14:36 is to be found in the light of its whole context and Genesis 22. Jesus' final trial in Gethsemane appears to be modelled on the supreme trial of Abraham and Isaac. Despite his horror and anguish before the prospect of an imminent sacrificial death, Isaac calls to Abraham his *Abba* and, as a faithful son, obeys the voice of God speaking through his father. Parallel to this, Jesus says *Abba* to God in the same way that Isaac does to Abraham. In this context, *Abba* has the meaning of 'father' in the sense of a relationship to a devoted and obedient son. In Jesus' supreme hour of trial, it is his trust and obedience to God as *Abba* that carries him through, even to the cross. This meaning of *Abba* may prompt further study of the significance of *son* in other NT texts to discover whether the obediential aspect may be more prominent than has been suspected. The father-son relationship in Genesis 22 may be a far-reaching New Testament model of that between Jesus and God."⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁴See *Everyday Life in Bible Times*, p. 91; and *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Canaan, Canaanite," p. 186.

⁷¹⁵Delitzsch, 2:91.

⁷¹⁶Josephus, 1:13:43.

⁷¹⁷Joseph A. Grassi, "Abba, Father (Mark 14:36): Another Approach," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50:3 (September 1982):455.

Abraham referred to the sacrifice he *would offer*, supposedly Isaac, but in reality God's substitute for Isaac, as "the lamb." This statement (v. 8), of course, proved prophetic of Jesus Christ as well (John 1:29). Abraham *spoke* better than he *knew*.

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). Josephus recorded a conversation between Abraham and Isaac at this point, in which Abraham explained to his son what he was about to do and why, and in which Isaac verbalized his willingness to die.⁷¹⁸

"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."⁷¹⁹

The possibility of Isaac resisting may have been the reason why Abraham "bound" him on the altar.

"The sacrifice was already accomplished in his [Abraham's] heart, and he had fully satisfied the requirements of God."⁷²⁰

"The test, instead of breaking him, brings him to the summit of his lifelong walk with God."⁷²¹

God had previously told Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice (v. 2), but now He told him not to sacrifice him ("Do not stretch out your hand"; v. 12). Sometimes, even today, we may proceed on a course of action believing that God has called us to it. Yet afterward, we may become equally convinced that He wants us to do the very opposite. We should not necessarily conclude that we were wrong in the first case. God may be testing our faith, as He did Abraham's.

As a result of this incident, Abraham gained a greater appreciation of God as the One who will provide or "look out for" him (*Yahweh-jireh*, lit. "The LORD Sees") 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

⁷¹⁸Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 1:13:3-4.

⁷¹⁹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 110.

⁷²⁰Keil and Delitzsch, 1:250.

⁷²¹Kidner, pp. 142-43. See Donald Campbell, "Passing the Test," *Kindred Spirit* 9:2 (Summer 1985):9-10.

avored vassal who now possessed a ratified promise, comparable to the royal grants attested in the ancient Near East. God contextualized His self-revelation to Abraham (and to the readers of the narrative) within the relational, metaphorical framework of a covenant lord. Thus one should not be surprised to hear Him speak in ways that reflect the relational role He assumed within this metaphorical framework."⁷²²

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. This is the first explicit mention in the Bible of the substitutionary sacrifice of one life for another. The LORD appeared again ("The angel of the Lord called . . . a second time") 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 ("By Myself I have sworn") only this one time in His dealings *with the patriarchs*. Moses referred to this oath later in Israel's history (24:7; 26:3; 50:24; Exod. 13:5, 11; 33:1; et al.; cf. Heb. 6:13-14).

". . . 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."⁷²³

One writer suggested that 22:15-18 really ". . . describes the establishment of the covenant of circumcision first mentioned in Genesis 17."⁷²⁴ 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). "Greatly bless" and "greatly multiply" (v. 17) translate a Hebrew idiom in which the verb is doubled to stress the certainty of the action.

"Here again God promised Abraham that he would become the recipient of the covenant blessings. The covenant was not based on obedience, nor was the perpetuity of the covenant based on obedience—but rather the reception of

⁷²²Chisholm, "Anatomy of . . .," p. 13.

⁷²³Ross, "Genesis," p. 65.

⁷²⁴T. Desmond Alexander, "Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (February 1983):17.

covenant blessings was conditioned on obedience. Remember, an unconditional covenant may have conditional blessings."⁷²⁵

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.⁷²⁶

Every time Abraham made a sacrifice for God the Lord responded by giving Abraham more:

1. Abraham left his homeland; God gave him a new one.
2. Abraham left his extended family; God gave him a much larger family.
3. Abraham offered the best of the land to Lot; God gave him more land.
4. Abraham gave up the King of Sodom's reward; God gave Abraham more wealth.

⁷²⁵Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom . . .*, pp. 66-67.

⁷²⁶John Lawlor developed these other themes in "The Test of Abraham: Genesis 22:11-19," *Grace Theological Journal* 1:1 (Spring 1980):19-35. See also Abraham Kuruvilla, "The *Aqedah* (Genesis 22): What is the Author *Doing* with What He is *Saying*?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55:3 (September 2012):489-508.

5. Abraham gave up Ishmael; God made Ishmael the father of a multitude of Abraham's posterity.
6. Abraham was willing to give up Isaac; God allowed Isaac to live, and through him gave Abraham numerous seed.

In each case, God gave Abraham a deeper relationship with Himself, as well as more material prosperity. Note the closeness of this fellowship in Abraham's response to God's revelations: "Here I am" (vv. 1, 11).

God has not promised Christians great physical blessings (cf. 2 Tim. 3:2), but whenever we make a sacrifice for Him, He at least gives us a deeper relationship with Himself (cf. John 15:14). For this reason we should not fear making personal sacrifices for God.

Note, too, that what God called Abraham to give back to Him, each time, was something that He had provided or would provide for Abraham supernaturally, in faithfulness to His promise. Sometimes God tests our faith by asking us to give back to Him what He has supernaturally and faithfully provided, not just what He has provided through regular channels.

This test of Abraham's faith is the climax of his personal history. It is the last major incident in the record of his life.

". . . God does not demand a literal human sacrifice from His worshippers, but the spiritual sacrifice of an unconditional denial of the natural life, even to submission to death itself."⁷²⁷

The faithful believer will surrender to God *whatever* He may ask, all the while 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 genealogical connections with the East. The record of Nahor's 12 sons prepares the way for the story of Isaac's marriage. It also shows that "Rebekah" ("Heifer," "Soft," or "Supple") was the daughter of Bethuel's *wife* (v. 23), not the daughter of Bethuel's *concubine* (v. 24). Isaac's marriage was very important because Isaac was the heir of the promises (ch. 24).

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—

⁷²⁷Keil and Delitzsch, 1:252.

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 go back to his native homeland. Since he was a "sojourner" (temporary resident) in Canaan, his friends and relatives probably expected him to bury Sarah back in their home area, namely, Mesopotamia.

The two major events contained in this chapter continue Moses' emphasis on God's faithfulness. They do so by recording the death of Abraham's wife, the mother of his heir, and by showing the beginning of the fulfillment of the land promise that God had given Abraham.

23:1-2 Sarah is the only *woman* whose age at death ("127 years" old) the Scriptures record (v. 1). She is also the only woman whose name God changed (17:15). This notation of her age illustrates her importance. Isaac was 37 years old when his mother died. Abraham died at the age of 175 (25:8), 38 years after Sarah.

Abraham and Sarah had moved back near Hebron after having lived at Beersheba for some time (v. 2; cf. 22:19). "Kiriath-arba" means "Village of Four" (cf. Josh. 14:15).

"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."⁷²⁸

⁷²⁸Monson, pp. 153-54.

23:3-16 Typically, ancient Near Easterners buried family members in their native land.⁷²⁹ 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).⁷³⁰

"Abraham has put himself at the bottom of the social ladder, and they put him at the top."⁷³¹

"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."⁷³²

These "Hittites" ("sons of Heth" or "Hethites") were residents of Canaan, not members of the mighty Hittite Empire, that later flourished north of the Promised Land, in modern Turkey and Syria, ancient Anatolia.⁷³³

Why did "Ephron" want to sell Abraham the entire plot of ground ("field") 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.⁷³⁴

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

⁷²⁹Ross, "Genesis," p. 66.

⁷³⁰On Abraham as a "mighty prince," see Wiseman, "Abraham . . . Part II: Abraham the Prince," pp. 228-37.

⁷³¹E. F. Roop, *Genesis*, p. 154.

⁷³²Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 127.

⁷³³See Bryant G. Wood, "Hittites and Hethites: A Proposed Solution to an Etymological Conundrum," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:2 (June 2011):239-50.

⁷³⁴Barker, p. 134.

per acre.⁷³⁵ 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)."⁷³⁶

Coins were not minted until the seventh century B.C., so Abraham would have paid for his land by weighed pieces of silver. 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 objective may have been to get a present (favor; gratuity; exchange gift) from Abraham, for having given him the field and cave, that would compensate for the value of the land. Such a gift was customary. On the other hand, he may have wanted to preclude Abraham's offering to pay him less than his asking price (v. 15).⁷³⁷

"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."⁷³⁸

"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."⁷³⁹

23:17-18 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, in order to express his belief that God would eventually bring the Israelites back there (cf. Jer. 32:6-15). One does not usually bury his family in a place unless he considers it his home and plans to be there a long time.

⁷³⁵Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventy-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 1:356.

⁷³⁶Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 135.

⁷³⁷See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:255-56; Leupold, 2:650; and G. C. Aalders, *Genesis*, 2:58-59.

⁷³⁸von Rad, p. 250.

⁷³⁹Leupold, 2:653.

23:19-20 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."⁷⁴⁰

"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."⁷⁴¹

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, on the other hand, 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 their hope in God's promises.

17. The choice of a bride for Isaac ch. 24

Abraham's servant, who was evidently Eliezer, returned to Paddan-aram, charged with the duty of finding a suitable bride for Isaac. He faithfully and resolutely fulfilled his task, relying on God's faithfulness to prosper his journey, and God's providence to guide him. God directed him to Rebekah.

The length of this story, and the amount of detail included, suggest that this incident played an important part in the fulfillment of the Author's purpose. This is the longest chapter in Genesis.⁷⁴² The details show how God provided a wife and seed-bearer for Isaac, and thereby remained faithful to His promises to Abraham. God's working providentially through the natural course of events to accomplish His purposes clarifies His ways with humankind.

⁷⁴⁰Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 136.

⁷⁴¹Davis, p. 223.

⁷⁴²See 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."⁷⁴³

"This . . . narrative is the most pleasant and charming of all the patriarchal stories."⁷⁴⁴

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.

24:1-9 The "thigh" may be a euphemism for the genitals (v. 2).⁷⁴⁵ The ancients considered the "thigh" to be the source of posterity and the seat of power (cf. 47:29).

"By putting his hand under Abraham's thigh, the servant was touching his genitals and thus giving the oath a special 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."⁷⁴⁶

"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."⁷⁴⁷

Abraham's insistence on a non-Canaanite wife for Isaac (v. 3) was not racial preference, but theological. The Canaanites worshipped Baal and Asherah (cf. 15:16; Deut. 7:3), but Abraham's extended family evidently worshipped the *true God* (cf. v. 31; 11:27—12:4; Josh. 24:2).

"Isaac was not regarded as a merely pious candidate for matrimony, but as the heir of the promise, who must therefore be kept from any alliance with the race whose

⁷⁴³Ross, "Genesis," p. 67.

⁷⁴⁴von Rad, p. 253. Cf. 15:18-20.

⁷⁴⁵Ibid., p. 254; cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 327.

⁷⁴⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 141.

⁷⁴⁷Howard 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.

possessions were to come to his descendants, and which was ripening for the judgment to be executed by those descendants."⁷⁴⁸

"He will send His angel before you" (v. 7) means that God would prepare the way for Abraham's servant's arrival.

24:10-28 "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).⁷⁴⁹ "Mesopotamia" means "Aram of the Two Rivers," and refers to the region between and surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. 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.

"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)."⁷⁵⁰

Rebekah's name means "Ensnaring Beauty," and Moses commented on her beauty (v. 16). It might seem strange that he wrote, apparently redundantly, that she was "a virgin, and no man had had relations with her." But the Hebrew word translated "virgin" generally means "young woman," and is therefore not a precise term; it needed some clarification.

24:29-61 "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."⁷⁵¹

Repeating an event confirmed its truthfulness in Scripture (cf. 41:32).

⁷⁴⁸E. W. Hengstenberg, *Dissertations on the Genuineness of the Pentateuch*, 1:350. Cf. Esau's Canaanite wives, and Ishmael's Egyptian wife.

⁷⁴⁹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 142-43, 146.

⁷⁵⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 326.

⁷⁵¹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 177.

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 principal negotiator who represented the family—rather than Bethuel, her father (cf. v. 50), or her mother (vv. 53, 55; cf. 34:11-17; 42:1-3).

Another view is that Bethuel was simply too old, infirm, or was under his wife's control, as Rebekah later "organized" Isaac.⁷⁵² The description of the family farewell also reflects Laban's leadership (vv. 59-60).⁷⁵³ Rebekah demonstrated her faith in *Abraham's God*, in her decisively choosing to *leave her family* in order to marry Isaac (cf. the similar choices of Abraham and Ruth; Ruth 1:16).

24:62-67 "Beer-lahai-roi," the place where Isaac lived and meditated (v. 62), was a place where God had previously answered prayer (cf. 16:14). This suggests that Isaac may have been praying for God's will to be done in the choice of his wife.

Rebekah dismounted out of respect for her intended husband (cf. Josh. 15:18; 1 Sam. 25:23). Her self-veiling ("she took a veil and covered herself") hinted at her soon becoming his bride, since it was customary to veil the bride in a marriage ceremony. Normally Israelite women did not wear veils (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."⁷⁵⁴

The significance of this long story in the larger context of special revelation is fourfold at least.

1. Primarily it demonstrates God's faithfulness to His promise to provide descendants for Abraham and, therefore, His trustworthiness. Along with this is the assurance that, even though Abraham was soon to die, God would fulfill His promises in the future.
2. It reveals that God guides people who are seeking His will so that they will discover it.

⁷⁵²Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 149.

⁷⁵³See West, pp. 67-68; and Speiser, pp. 184-85.

⁷⁵⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 178.

3. It illustrates God's later selection of a Bride, that He chose *out of the world for His Son*, through the *Holy Spirit's agency*, as revealed and taught in the New Testament.
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."⁷⁵⁵

18. Abraham's death 25:1-11

Before Abraham died, he made sure that God's covenantal blessing would be Isaac's by sending his other sons away. After he died, God confirmed his decision by blessing Isaac.

"It is only said of Isaac among Abraham's children that "God [*'elohim*]" blessed" him (v. 11; cf. 24:1, 35); this language is used rarely in Scripture, appearing in creation narratives (1:22, 28; 2:3; 9:1)."⁷⁵⁶

Abraham's sons by Keturah 25:1-6

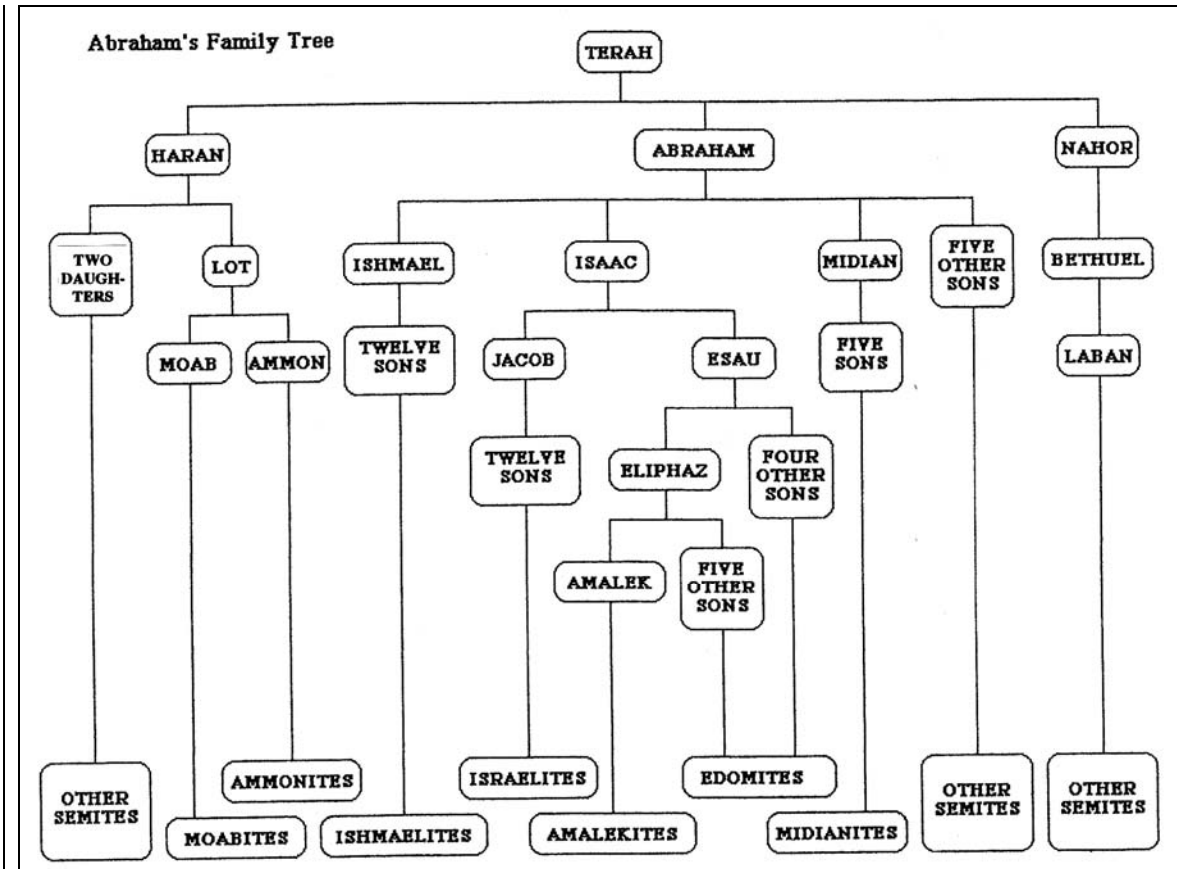
"Keturah" (lit. "Enveloped in Fragrant Smoke") may have been a concubine like Hagar (v. 6; 1 Chron. 1:32). Jewish tradition identified Keturah as Hagar.⁷⁵⁷ It is not possible to prove that Abraham married Keturah, and that she bore him six sons after Sarah's death, though this was probably the case.⁷⁵⁸ He may have married her earlier in his life while Sarah was alive.

⁷⁵⁵Wolfgang M. W. Roth, "The Wooing of Rebekah: A Tradition-Critical Study of Genesis 24," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 (1972):181.

⁷⁵⁶Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 348-49.

⁷⁵⁷*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Targum Neofiti I* (margin), and *Genesis Rabbah* 61:4.

⁷⁵⁸Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 1:15:1.



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.

"It is related of this Ophren [translated "Epher," v. 4], that he made war against Libya, and took it; and that his grandchildren, when they inhabited it, called it (from his name) Africa; and indeed Alexander Polyhistor gives his attestation to what I here say . . ." ⁷⁵⁹

"The land of the East" (v. 6), to which Abraham sent his "other" sons (than Isaac), was evidently Arabia. It lay to the east and south of Canaan. God's promise that "through Isaac your descendants shall be named" (21:12) led Abraham to act as he did, as Moses recorded here.

⁷⁵⁹Ibid.

"In this case the sending away of the sons is to make Isaac's position more secure."⁷⁶⁰

In this section and the following two (vv. 7-11 and 12-18), those characters who play minor parts in the drama take their curtain calls, making way for the chief actors who follow.

Abraham's death and Isaac's blessing 25:7-11

Isaac would have been 75 years old, and Jacob 15, when Abraham died (v. 7; cf. 21:5; 25:26).⁷⁶¹ 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.'"⁷⁶²

The phrase "gathered to his people" (v. 8) implies reunion in Sheol, the place of departed spirits, with ancestors who had died previously. It presupposes continued personal existence after physical death (cf. 15:15; Heb. 11:13). Abraham was "buried in the [C]ave of Machpelah" near Mamre, the old site that later became a part of Hebron (v. 9).

God's dealings now focus on Isaac, who then lived near Hagar's well at "Beer-lahai-roi" (lit. "The Well of the One Who Lives and Who Sees Me"; v. 11; cf. 16:14; 24:62). Archaeologists have yet to find this site. It was evidently somewhere south of Beersheba in the Negev.

God's servants should do all in their power to ensure the continuation of God's program to bless from one generation to the next.

B. WHAT BECAME OF ISHMAEL 25:12-18

"The last four *toledot* sections of the Book of Genesis follow a definite pattern: the lines in each generation that are not chosen lines are traced before the narrative returns to the chosen line."⁷⁶³

⁷⁶⁰Loren Fisher, "An Amarna Age Prodigal," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 3:2 (April 1958):119.

⁷⁶¹See the chart "Patriarchal Chronological Data" earlier in these notes.

⁷⁶²Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 167.

⁷⁶³Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 429.

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). There is probably an intentional parallel with the 10 nations mentioned in the Table of Nations (ch. 10), suggesting that God would bless all the families of the earth through other special families.

These verses show that God fulfilled His promises regarding Ishmael (16:10-12; 17:20). Ishmael, like Nahor and Jacob, fathered 12 sons. Moses drew Ishmael's personal history to a conclusion, before he moved on to concentrate on his brother Isaac.

"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."⁷⁶⁴

The Ishmaelites lived in Arabia. Arabia lay to the southeast of Canaan, and extended from the Euphrates River to the Red Sea.⁷⁶⁵ 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)."⁷⁶⁶

Ishmael died at 137 years of age, having lived 48 years after Abraham's death. The writer probably included the fact, that Ishmael lived "in defiance of all his relations" (v. 18), in order to show the fulfillment of God's prediction to Hagar (cf. 16:12). The bedouin-like Ishmaelites later had many conflicts with their more settled Israelite relatives.

God is faithful to His promises to bless whom He has promised to bless.

C. WHAT BECAME OF ISAAC 25:19—35:29

A new *toledot* begins with 25:19. Its theme is "the acquisition of the blessing and its development and protection by the Lord."⁷⁶⁷

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.

⁷⁶⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 181.

⁷⁶⁵Josephus, 1:12:4.

⁷⁶⁶Davis, p. 231.

⁷⁶⁷Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 433.

- "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)."⁷⁶⁸

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 . . ." ⁷⁶⁹

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.

⁷⁶⁸Ibid., p. 85. Cf. Fishbane, p. 42; Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 169; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 352.

⁷⁶⁹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 168.

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)."⁷⁷⁰

The question of *an heir* continues to be primary in this section: "Who will be Isaac's heir through whom God will fulfill His promises?" 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.

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 firstborn 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]."⁷⁷¹

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.

⁷⁷⁰Ross, *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.

⁷⁷¹Thomas, p. 230.

- 25:21 Rebekah "was barren" for 20 years after she married Isaac (vv. 20, 26). God closed her womb for that time, so that the chosen family would recognize her children as the fruit of His grace, rather than simply the fruit of nature. Isaac was apparently the only monogamous patriarch among the first three: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- 25:22-23 Rebekah's pregnancy was so painful ("the children struggled together within her"), that she wondered if there was any point to going on living ("Why am I [alive]?"). 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."⁷⁷² 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 subsequent scheming to obtain the birthright and the blessing was unnecessary, because God had already 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 name of the Edomites' [probably] wooded homeland). "Jacob" means "El Will Protect."⁷⁷³ Hairiness seems to have been a mark of incivility in the ancient world, indicative of an animal-like nature.⁷⁷⁴ 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."⁷⁷⁵

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 years old (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, "skillful hunter," but Jacob remained "in [his] tents." The name "Esau" sounds like the Hebrew word that means "hairy." And "Jacob" sounds like the Hebrew word that means "heel."

". . . 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

⁷⁷²Davis, p. 232.

⁷⁷³Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 178.

⁷⁷⁴Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading*, p. 288. See also Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 356.

⁷⁷⁵Keil and Delitzsch, 1:268.

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."⁷⁷⁶

"The two characters are utter opposites, as the two nations will eventually be."⁷⁷⁷

The Hebrew word *tam*, translated "plain," probably means civilized and domesticated, a "homebody."⁷⁷⁸ Translators have rendered it "perfect" and "blameless" elsewhere (Job 1:1, 8; 8:20; Ps. 37:37; Prov. 29:10). It may imply a quiet, self-contained, detached person, complete in himself.⁷⁷⁹ The NET Bible translators translated it "even-tempered."

"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."⁷⁸⁰

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)."⁷⁸¹

- 25:29-30 The Hebrew word translated "stew" literally means "lentils." Esau wanted to "gulp it down" (Heb. *la'at*), and he called the stew "red stuff."
- 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 Jacob valued the "birthright," but it was wrong that he obtained it the way 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 (be served; v. 23).

⁷⁷⁶Donald B. Sharp, "In Defense of Rebecca," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 10:4 (October 1980):165.

⁷⁷⁷Kidner, p. 152.

⁷⁷⁸Hamilton, *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.

⁷⁷⁹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 177.

⁷⁸⁰Vance L. Shepperson, "Jacob's Journey: From Narcissism Toward Wholeness," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12:3 (1984):180.

⁷⁸¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 363.

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."⁷⁸²

The writer showed that the natures of the two sons were very different: they were not "identical" twins, obviously. Esau cared only for *physical and material* things, whereas Jacob valued the *spiritual*. Esau gave priority to the immediate satisfaction of his sensual desires, but Jacob was willing to wait for something better that God had promised for the future (cf. Heb. 12:16).

"The frivolity with which he [Esau] sold his birthright . . . rendered him unfit to be the heir and possessor of the promised grace."⁷⁸³

"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."⁷⁸⁴

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 also included a *double portion of the inheritance* (Deut. 21:17), and the privilege of being the *priest* (spiritual leader) *of the family*.⁷⁸⁵

Judah, Joseph, and Levi later received the privileges of the birthright. Judah obtained leadership among the tribes (*possession of Canaan* and *covenant fellowship*), eventually through David and Messiah. Joseph received the *double portion* through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Levi became the *priestly* tribe. In the New Testament, we learn that Christ is the Firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Heb. 12:23). He is the great Birthright-Bearer.

"It is quite apparent from the Nuzi tablets that instances of the transference of birthright, such as occurred in the Patriarchal narratives, were not uncommon in Hurrian society. One example concerns a certain Zirteshup, whose father disowned him but later restored his status. . . . Another instance of the transference of birthright from the Nuzi tablets is the exchange by one Kurpazah of his birthright in consideration for three

⁷⁸²Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 449.

⁷⁸³Keil and Delitzsch, 1:269.

⁷⁸⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 352.

⁷⁸⁵See 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.

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."⁷⁸⁶

Even though Esau was a *cunning* (skillful) hunter, he placed little value on his privilege as the firstborn son. He was willing to trade it to his *crafty* brother for a meal of "red stuff," a fitting description of his own nature.⁷⁸⁷

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)."⁷⁸⁸

There are two important instances of *firstborn* sons relinquishing the rights of primogeniture in Genesis: Esau and Reuben. Esau considered his birthright of so little value, that he sold all his rights as *firstborn* to Jacob, just to realize an immediate physical gratification. Reuben forfeited his birthright through sexual promiscuity (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4). In Esau's case, his entire birthright went to Jacob. In Reuben's case, his birthright went to three of his brothers: Judah obtained the *regal* right, Levi eventually received the *priestly* right, and the blessing of the *double portion* went to Joseph—who realized it through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.⁷⁸⁹

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 so. In the previous generation, Isaac was the recipient of God's grace, while Lot and Ishmael were not. Abraham was a recipient, too, whereas his brothers were not.

⁷⁸⁶West, p. 71.

⁷⁸⁷See 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.

⁷⁸⁸Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 446.

⁷⁸⁹See Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, pp. 138-40.

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."⁷⁹⁰

God has given Christians special promises as well (e.g., His presence, strength, provisions, fruitfulness, glorification, rewards). How might we "despise" these? By living primarily for the present rather than for the future.

This section is a warning: that profane (secular) people, who live to satisfy their fleshly appetites, will lose the more valuable things of lasting spiritual worth. Christians who live for the present will not lose their eternal *salvation*, but they will lose some of their eternal *reward* (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15).

3. Isaac and Abimelech 26:1-11

God prevented Isaac from leaving the Promised Land (which included "Gerar," where "the Philistines" lived), and at this time renewed the covenant with him. Soon afterward, the LORD had to *protect* Rebekah when Isaac lied to "Abimelech" about his relationship with her ("She is my sister," v. 7).

"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."⁷⁹¹

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 versus 20—21) show that the writer wanted the reader to compare and contrast the two men.⁷⁹²

⁷⁹⁰Edith Schaeffer, "What Is My Mess of Pottage?" *Christianity Today* (March 14, 1975), p. 50.

⁷⁹¹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 185.

⁷⁹²See 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."⁷⁹³

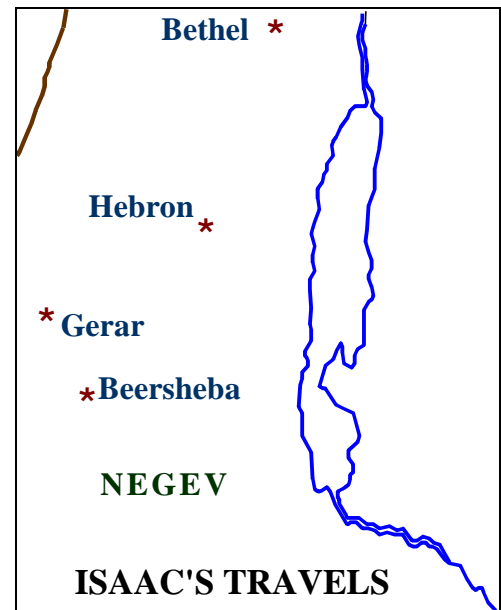
"The chapter before us is full of illustrations of how difficulties should and should not be met."⁷⁹⁴

26:1-6 Isaac was evidently considering going "to Egypt" to escape the "famine." He was in "Gerar," living close to "Abimelech king of the Philistines" (vv. 8-9), when God spoke to him. This was God's first *recorded* revelation to Isaac ("the LORD appeared to him and said . . ."; 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 first major migration of "the Philistines" into Canaan took place hundreds of years later, in the twelfth century B.C. However, there were some "Philistines" (perhaps an unrelated ethnic group) already in Canaan in Abraham's and Isaac's time, as is clear from this reference and others in Genesis (see the notes in the section 21:22-34).

The "famine in the land" (of Canaan) created a crisis for Isaac. God's will for Isaac to remain in the land was definite, and He communicated it clearly to the patriarch. Perhaps God wanted Isaac to stay in the land so he would learn that God would "be with [him] and bless [him]" (v. 3). God reiterated His promise given earlier to Abraham—now to Isaac—in order to give Isaac a promise to believe in and the encouragement to obey Him. Promises of protection are also prominent in the Jacob story (cf. 26:24; 28:15, 20; 31:3, 5, 42; 32:10).

The promise, specifically, was that God would protect ("be with") and "bless" Isaac, "multiply" his "descendants," and



⁷⁹³Charles R. Erdman, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 86.

⁷⁹⁴Thomas, p. 238.

"give" them "all *these* lands" (emphasis added; v. 4; i.e., the lands held by the various Canaanite tribes). One reason for God's blessing of Isaac was Abraham's obedience to God (v. 5; cf. 22:18). (This verse was the basis upon which the Jews of Jesus' day believed that Abraham kept the whole Law of Moses before it was given.⁷⁹⁵) Isaac became the spiritual beneficiary of a godly parent, but *he* had the opportunity to *increase* God's blessing on him, through his own obedience to God (cf. John 15:14).

"The Abrahamic blessing will pass to Isaac. Everything included in that blessing will now belong to the son, and in turn will be passed on to his sons. But there is a 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."⁷⁹⁶

Verse 5 reads as though Abraham kept the actual "commandments," "statutes," and "laws" of the Mosaic Covenant—before they were even in existence! It also *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.'"⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹⁵C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 86. Cf. *Kiddushin* 4:14. (*Kiddushin* is the last tractate of the third order of the *Mishnah Nashim*.)

⁷⁹⁶The NET Bible note on 26:3.

⁷⁹⁷John H. Sailhamer, "The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (Fall 1991):253, 254. Cf. John 6:29.

"Israel would immediately see Torah (Law) terminology in the record of Abraham, and would be prompted to keep the Law."⁷⁹⁸

26:7-11 For an explanation of this strange incident, see the notes on chapter 20. When endangered, Isaac, like Abraham, resorted to a "situation ethic" in which the end "justifies" the means (i.e., he told a partial truth, because Rebekah was his "sister" in a sense, being his *cousin*, although this was a worse lie than Abraham's, since Sarai actually *was his* sister, or at least his "half-sister"). "Like father, like son." Isaac and Rebekah must have been childless at this time, because otherwise, any children with them would have exposed their "cover story."

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 that time. Certainly in both cases, the "Abimelech" demonstrated pious conduct. In the first case, however, the Abimelech took Sarah into his harem, but in the second, the Abimelech wanted to protect Rebekah from his people. "Abimelech" is a title rather than a personal name, and means "royal father." In view of these facts, 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 ("the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy"; vv. 12-13). Even Abimelech testified to Isaac's power ("you are too powerful for us"; v. 16), which was another testimony to God's faithfulness.

26:18-22 Isaac reopened ("dug again") the wells that Abraham had dug, which the native inhabitants had later filled "with earth." He also dug three new wells, which were named "Esek," "Sitnah," and "Rehoboth." In contrast with Abraham, Isaac "was called not so much to pioneer as to consolidate."⁷⁹⁹

This "wells" 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.

⁷⁹⁸Ross, "Genesis," p. 71.

⁷⁹⁹Kidner, p. 154.

The incident furthermore 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 expressed his trust in Yahweh.⁸⁰⁰

Isaac's decision to sojourn in the town of Gerar, "the valley of Gerar," and the general territory of the Philistines (vv. 1-22), seems to have been unwise, but was not sinful. Though he sinned in misrepresenting his relationship to Rebekah out of fear (v. 7), his choice to live in 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. The very night he arrived, God "appeared" to him there (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 ("pitched his tent") there.

Settlers could only continue to live in an area where there was a working, water-yielding well. Wells were vital to the life of nomadic herdsmen. While there was probably at least one well at Beersheba already, Isaac dug another for his own use, or perhaps because he needed more water for his "great . . . flocks and herds" and "household" (family and servants). His ability to dig wells indicates both his wealth and his intention to establish permanent residence in the land.

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 then made a parity covenant (treaty) of mutual non-aggression. They sealed it by eating a meal together, "a feast" that Isaac made for his new friends. Eating together was often a sacred rite in the ancient Near East (cf. 27:3; 4; 31:46, 54). This covenant renewed the older one made between Abimelech and Abraham (21:31). The exchange of "oaths," and Isaac's official renaming of the town "Beersheba" (they also dug a new well they named "Shibah," after their new town "Beersheba," v. 33; 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

⁸⁰⁰See note on 48:22.

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."⁸⁰¹

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 productively, as the incentive to persuade Isaac to send Jacob away to get a wife (27:4b), and because they were the reason Isaac did so (28:1).

The main account centers on Isaac giving 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)."⁸⁰²

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 instead sought to establish himself as a great man in the world by marrying Canaanite women (cf. 11:4).

⁸⁰¹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 196.

⁸⁰²Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 474. Cf. Fokkelman, p. 101.

These were evidently the "daughter[s]" of *Canaanite lords*.⁸⁰³ 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."⁸⁰⁴

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).⁸⁰⁵ 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."⁸⁰⁶

"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."⁸⁰⁷

An oral blessing was as legally binding as a written will in the ancient Near East.⁸⁰⁸ It finalized, and perhaps altered, the terms of the birthright. In the case of Abraham's family, it was a prophecy regarding *through whom* and *how* God would bless. When Jacob blessed his sons (49:1-28), each son got part of his blessing.

"As in modern society, inheritance under Nuzi law was effected by testamentary disposition, although the [Nuzi] tablets indicate that such a testament was often made orally. One of the tablets tells of a lawsuit between brothers concerning the possession of their late father's slave girl,

⁸⁰³Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 1:18:4. See K. Luke, "Esau's Marriage," *Indian Theological Studies* 25:2 (June 1988):171-90.

⁸⁰⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 189.

⁸⁰⁵See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 418-19, for clarification of the difference between a birthright and a blessing.

⁸⁰⁶Leupold, 2:735.

⁸⁰⁷Ross, "Genesis," pp. 72, 73.

⁸⁰⁸See Davis, p. 239.

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)."⁸⁰⁹

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.⁸¹⁰

"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."⁸¹¹

". . . Isaac's sensuality is more powerful than his theology."⁸¹²

27:5-17 It seems consistent with the character of Rebekah, as presented elsewhere in Genesis, to interpret her actions here as predictable, if not commendable. A sincere desire to make sure that Isaac's blessing went to the divinely chosen, more responsible of her sons—apparently is what motivated her (cf. 25:23). While her motive seems to have been good, her method evidenced lack of faith in God.⁸¹³ In this she reminds us of Sarai, who tried to obtain what God had promised illegitimately, namely: an heir through Hagar (16:1-3). Rebekah tried to "pull the wool" over Isaac's eyes.

⁸⁰⁹West, p. 71. See also Ephraim Speiser, "I Know Not the Day of My Death," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74 (1955):252-56.

⁸¹⁰Meir 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.

⁸¹¹Keil and Delitzsch, 1:274.

⁸¹²Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 206.

⁸¹³See Sharp, pp. 164-68.

"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."⁸¹⁴

People used the black, silk-like hair of the *camel-goat* of the East ("young goats"; v. 16) as a substitute for human hair as late as the Roman period.⁸¹⁵

27:18-29 The explanation of Isaac's *blessing* occurring in verse 23 is that it is *proleptic*; it refers to the blessing in verses 27-29, not some other blessing that preceded that one.

Jacob's kiss recalls another deceptive show of affection, namely, Judas' kiss of Jesus (Matt. 26:48-49).

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)."⁸¹⁶

27:30-45 Isaac evidently knew that he had been resisting God's will and finally accepted defeat submissively ("Yes, and *he shall be blessed*," emphasis

⁸¹⁴Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 216.

⁸¹⁵Keil and Delitzsch, 1:275, n. 1.

⁸¹⁶*Ibid.*, 1:276-77.

added; v. 33). Besides, in that culture, a paternal blessing, much more a *divine oracle*, such as the one Isaac had uttered, was irrevocable.⁸¹⁷

"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."⁸¹⁸

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"; in fact, it resembled more of a "curse." 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" (Esau's "dwelling") 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 16:6).

Hundreds of years later, John Hyrcanus conquered Edom about 129 B.C., forced the Edomites to submit to circumcision, and incorporated them into the Jewish nation. Later, through Antipater and Herod, the Edomites established the Idumean dynasty over Judah, 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" of 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).

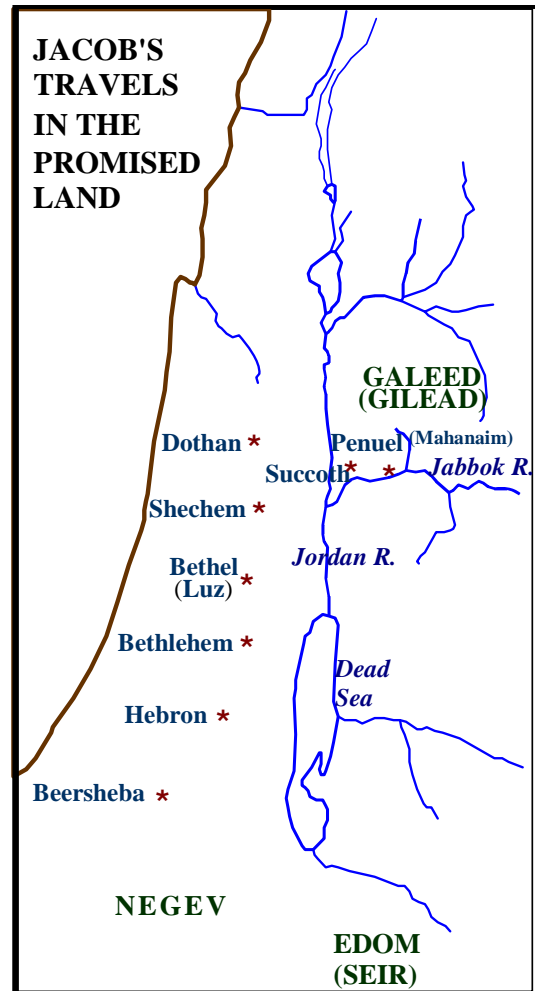
⁸¹⁷See A. C. Thiselton, "The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS25:2 (October 1972):294.

⁸¹⁸Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 191.

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. "Paddan-aram" was the area around Haran.⁸¹⁹ 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 it resulted in his having to flee from his home. As far as Genesis records, 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."⁸²⁰

"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."⁸²¹



Isaac evidently realized, by now, that his desire to give the blessing to Esau was not God's will, so, having given it to Jacob (27:27-29), he "blessed" him further (28:1-4).⁸²²

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.

⁸¹⁹See the map "Abraham's Travels Outside the Promised Land" under my comments on 11:27-32 for its location.

⁸²⁰Kidner, p. 157.

⁸²¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 382.

⁸²²Concerning Isaac's desire that Jacob marry someone from outside the Promised Land, see the note at 24:3-4.

"What man intends for evil God utilizes for good."⁸²³

Many years later, the aged Jacob blessed Joseph's younger son "Ephraim" instead of his older brother "Manasseh" (48:14-19). He certainly must have remembered how he had deceived his father Isaac to get his blessing. Joseph's approach to Jacob on that occasion was honorable by contrast, and his life was free of the consequences of deceit. This was not true of Jacob's life.

Jacob reaped what he sowed (Gal. 6:7). Laban later deceived him, and later still, *his own sons* (in the case of the sale of Joseph) did so—even more cruelly than he deceived Isaac.⁸²⁴

Esau's further marriages 28:6-9

Esau sought to obtain his parents' approval by marrying one of Abraham's descendants (a granddaughter, who was Ishmael's daughter "Mahalath"). The patriarch's wives were key to promises concerning descendants. "Mahalath" ("Dance," v. 9) is evidently another name for, and the same woman as, "Basemath," Ishmael's daughter (36:2).

However, "he 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."⁸²⁵

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

"From a 'stone pillow' to a 'stone pillar,' this account tells how Jacob's lodging place at Bethel became the most celebrated place of worship among the patriarchal narratives."⁸²⁶

Yahweh appeared at the top of an angel-filled stairway, restating the promise made to Abraham, and adding more promises of blessing and protection for Jacob. Upon waking, Jacob acknowledged God's presence, memorialized the place with a monument "stone" and a "name" ("Bethel"), and vowed to worship the Lord there *if He did* bless and protect

⁸²³Davis, p. 238. Cf. Rom. 8:28.

⁸²⁴For some helpful insights into Jacob's character, see R. Paul Stevens, "Family Feud," *His* 42:3 (December 1981):18-20.

⁸²⁵Keil and Delitzsch, 1:281.

⁸²⁶Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 442.

him: "If God will be with me and will keep me . . . and will give me food . . . and garments . . . and I return . . . in safety . . . then the LORD will be my God . . . This stone . . . will be God's house . . . and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth . . ."

"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."⁸²⁷

Bethel receives more mention in the Old Testament than any other city but Jerusalem. This indicates its importance in biblical history.

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.⁸²⁸

"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.'"⁸²⁹

Other visions of God's heavenly throne-room appear in 1 Kings 22:19-22; Job 1:6-8; 2:1-3; Isa. 6; Ezek. 1; Zech. 1:10; 6:5; Rev. 4—5; et al. 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, which also features a Bethel setting.

⁸²⁷Allen P. Ross, "Jacob's Visions: The Founding of Bethel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:567 (July-September 1985):226.

⁸²⁸See C. Houtman, "What Did Jacob See In His Dream At Bethel?" *Vetus Testamentum* 27:3 (July 1977):337-51.

⁸²⁹Keil and Delitzsch, 1:281-82.

Jacob was the second person in the Bible to hear the assurance "I am with you" (v. 15). Isaac was the first (cf. 26:3, 24). This was a promise that God later repeated to Moses (Exod. 3:12), Joshua (Josh. 1:5), Gideon (Judg. 6:16), regarding Immanuel (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), and to all Christians (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

Perhaps God's revelation surprised Jacob because he was preparing to leave the Promised Land (vv. 16-17). Jacob 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") means "the place where God dwells." The "gate of heaven" was 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)."⁸³⁰

"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."⁸³¹

28:18-22 Jacob "set [the stone] up as a pillar" (a memorial) to this revelation and God's promise (v. 18). *Pouring* "oil" on it constituted an act of consecration (cf. Lev. 8:10-12). 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 ("This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house," v. 22) if God would fulfill His promise (v. 15). This is the only recorded time that a patriarch proposed a vow with God (cf. 31:13). 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, though the record of Jacob's life shows that he typically was keen on negotiating deals. 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.⁸³²

"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

⁸³⁰Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 491.

⁸³¹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 193.

⁸³²On tithing, see the note on 14:20.

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."⁸³³

Jacob's relationship with Yahweh was quite different from what Abraham's or Isaac's relationship had been. God tested Abraham, but Jacob tested God. God told Abraham to leave his country before he entered into blessing, but Jacob imposed conditions on God before he vowed to bless God.⁸³⁴ Jacob was willing to accept God's promises, but he did not commit himself to God until God *proved Himself* faithful to him personally. God blessed Jacob because of His election of him, and because of Abraham's and Isaac's faith, more than because of Jacob's faith, at this time.

Many believers bargain with God as Jacob did here. They agree to worship Him on their terms, rather than because God has proven Himself faithful in the past. God often accommodates such weak faith, but the fact that He does so does not commend the practice of bargaining with God.

The personal revelation of God's presence and promised blessings inspires genuine worship. This worship is the appropriate response to such revelation.

7. Jacob's marriages and Laban's deception 29:1-30

The long account of Jacob's relationship with Laban (chs. 29—31) is the centerpiece of the Jacob story (chs. 25—35). It is a story within a story, and it too has a chiasmic structure. At its center is the account of the birth of Jacob's sons, who became the forefathers of the tribes of Israel (29:31-35).

Jacob met "Rachel" at a community well, and watered her (Laban's) flock of sheep, in spite of opposition against doing so. Jacob's "love" for Rachel (i.e., in the sense that he strongly preferred and desired her for marriage) led him to serve Laban for "seven years" to obtain her as his wife. But Laban deceived Jacob into marrying "Leah," the "firstborn," so Jacob had to work an extra "seven years" for Rachel.

"In Laban Jacob met his match and his means of discipline."⁸³⁵

"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."⁸³⁶

⁸³³Ross, "Genesis," p. 75.

⁸³⁴J. H. Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary*, pp. 573-74.

⁸³⁵Kidner, p. 159.

⁸³⁶Thomas, p. 269. Cf. Exod. 2:16-21.

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."⁸³⁷

Jacob had traveled 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 (Eliezer's) visit to the same area for the same purpose (ch. 22). Also, Jacob traveled alone and on foot, whereas Abraham's servant came with a well-laden camel train.

"True to his character, Jacob proceeds arrogantly, questioning the shepherds' carefree behavior (v. 7). For all the criticism one might level at Jacob's conduct, he was no slacker in his labor ethic (31:6, 38-41)."⁸³⁸

"Nahor" was actually the *grandfather* of Laban, not his father (v. 5; cf. 22:20-23). 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 they 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) may have been a different kind.

The male shepherds may have been unauthorized to roll the stone away because the well belonged to Laban; their inability may have been legal rather than physical.⁸³⁹

Jacob "wept" for joy and relief (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 apparently acted solely on the basis of Rachel's physical attractiveness. Her name means "Ewe Lamb."

"When Abraham's servant had discovered Rebekah's identity, he worshiped the Lord (24:24, 26), but here Jacob flexed his muscle, proving his capacity to serve Laban's house."⁸⁴⁰

"This scene [29:1-14] is chiefly about God's providence versus Jacob's prayerlessness . . ."⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁷Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 252.

⁸³⁸Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 462.

⁸³⁹Bush, 2:116-17.

⁸⁴⁰Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 463.

⁸⁴¹Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 402.

The suggestion of some interpreters that Laban *adopted* Jacob as his son is questionable.⁸⁴²

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.⁸⁴³ However, the Hebrew word translated "weak" can also mean "delicate," so Leah may have had lovely eyes. The New Revised Standard Version has "Leah's eyes were lovely." Her name means "Wild Cow."

"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."⁸⁴⁴

"*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)."⁸⁴⁵

Casual laborers received between one-half and one shekel a month in old Babylonia, which, because Jacob forfeited seven years of wages at that rate, was a large marriage gift he "paid" in exchange for Rachel's hand.⁸⁴⁶

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)."⁸⁴⁷

29:21-30 "This was about one of the meanest pranks ever played on a man."⁸⁴⁸

⁸⁴²See John Van Seters, "Jacob's Marriages and Ancient Near East Customs: A Reexamination," *Harvard Theological Review* 62:4 (October 1969):377-95.

⁸⁴³Keil and Delitzsch, 1:285; von Rad, p. 291.

⁸⁴⁴West, p. 70.

⁸⁴⁵Kidner, p. 160.

⁸⁴⁶G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, eds. and trans., *The Babylonian Laws*, 1:470-71.

⁸⁴⁷Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 498.

⁸⁴⁸Leupold, 2:795.

Jacob had pretended to be his *older brother*, and now Leah pretended to be her *younger sister*. Laban and Leah deceived Jacob, as Jacob and Rebekah had deceived Isaac. Perhaps Jacob's eating and drinking at the feast had clouded his mind (v. 22). The darkness of his tent at night, additionally, may have made it hard for him to see.⁸⁴⁹ Furthermore, in that culture a bride customarily entered her husband's presence "veiled."⁸⁵⁰ Von Rad wrote "heavily veiled," and Aalders "completely veiled."⁸⁵¹

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.⁸⁵²

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, giving away two of his *servants*.⁸⁵³

As Jacob had deceived Isaac by taking advantage of his inability *to see* due to poor eyesight (27:36), so Laban deceived Jacob by taking advantage of his inability *to see* in the dark tent (29:25). Earlier Jacob had deceptively pretended to be the older brother (ch. 27), and now Laban tricked him by replacing the younger with the older sister. Laban was just as *deceitful* as Jacob (v. 26)!

"For despicability Laban takes the prize in the Old Testament."⁸⁵⁴

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 ("Complete the week of this one," i.e., Leah's bridal week); cf. vv. 28, 30). (Josephus wrote that after the second seven years, Jacob took Rachel as his wife.⁸⁵⁵) The Hebrew name

⁸⁴⁹Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 1:19:6-7.

⁸⁵⁰S. R. Driver, *Genesis*, p. 271.

⁸⁵¹Von Rad, p. 291; Aalders, p. 115.

⁸⁵²See 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.

⁸⁵³Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 236. Cf. West, p. 70.

⁸⁵⁴Leupold, 2:798.

⁸⁵⁵Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 1:1:7.

"Rachel" means "Ewe," and "Leah" means "Cow." Ironically, Laban treated his own daughters like cattle and sheep, and used them for bargaining and trading. "Zilpah" means "Small Nose," and "Bilhah" means "Carefree." 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).⁸⁵⁶

"Jacob had planned to take Rachel as his wife, but God intended him to have Leah."⁸⁵⁷

Verses 29 and 30 help us to understand the "love/hate" language in the Bible. These terms often refer to someone's choice to "bless" or "not bless" another person (cf. Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13). In verse 29, we read: "Jacob . . . loved Rachel more than Leah," but in verse 30 we read: "Leah was hated [literal translation]." Jacob did not *really* "hate" Leah; he loved Rachel more than Leah. The statement that Jacob "hated" Leah describes his comparative affection for her, and his purpose to bestow less blessing on Leah than he would give to Rachel.

Evidence will follow that Leah was the more "spiritual" of the two sisters.

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 *talion* judgment; cf. Prov. 3:12; Gal. 6:7; Heb. 12:5-6).⁸⁵⁸

"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."⁸⁵⁹

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

⁸⁵⁶See Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 249.

⁸⁵⁷Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 195.

⁸⁵⁸For 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*.

⁸⁵⁹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 199.

the same as that of the brothers', Esau's and Jacob's, struggle: "Who will take the lead and be first, and who will have to serve?"

"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."⁸⁶⁰

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."⁸⁶¹

2. It gives the origins and circumstances surrounding the births of the tribal heads of Israel.

"The *theme* of the Pentateuch is not difficult to discern. It is the story of the birth and adolescence of a nation."⁸⁶²

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 proved to be the cue for Jacob to return home (30:25).

29:31-35 Moses recorded the births of Leah's first four sons: "Reuben," "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 (anger and despair), and Jacob's response (anger and defensiveness), contrast with how Rebekah and Isaac (prayed), and Sarah and Abraham (laughter and disbelief), had 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 had prayed that God would open Rebekah's womb, and had waited (25:21). Rachel and Jacob followed the example of Sarah and Abraham, however, to "correct" the problem.

⁸⁶⁰Ibid., p. 200.

⁸⁶¹Leupold, 2:800.

⁸⁶²Whybray, p. 9.

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.⁸⁶³

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)."⁸⁶⁴

30:14-21 The "mandrake," a member of the potato and tomato family, is a plant that bears bluish flowers in winter and yellowish plum-size fruit in summer. The fruit has a strong, pleasant fragrance, and was thought to help barren women conceive. Some Arabs still use it as an *aphrodisiac*, and call it "devil's apple" (cf. Song of Sol. 7:13).⁸⁶⁵

"The outcome was ironical, the mandrakes doing nothing for Rachel, while Leah gained another son by parting with them."⁸⁶⁶

"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)."⁸⁶⁷

"'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

⁸⁶³See Samuel Dresner, "Rachel and Leah: Sibling Tragedy or the Triumph of Piety and Compassion?" *Bible Review* 6:2 (April 1990):25.

⁸⁶⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 411.

⁸⁶⁵von Rad, p. 295. See H. Moldenke and A. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible*, pp. 137-39; M. Zoary, *Plants of the Bible*, pp. 188-89.

⁸⁶⁶Kidner, p. 162.

⁸⁶⁷Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 201.

(34:2, 7); Reuben with Bilhah (35:22); Potiphar's wife with Joseph (39:7, 10, 12, 14)."⁸⁶⁸

Leah received her other children, "Issachar," "Zebulun," and "Dinah," only because "God gave heed to Leah" (v. 17), not because of some magic supposedly connected with the mandrakes.

Jacob may have had other daughters besides Dinah (cf. 37:35 and 46:7). However, she may be the only one mentioned by name, simply because she is the only one whose experience Moses recorded later in Genesis (ch. 34). Her name is related to the Hebrew word that means "judgment."

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," in each story, reflects the attitudes toward God of the various characters, 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."⁸⁶⁹

"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."⁸⁷⁰

Believers should not envy and strive, which leads to bitter conflicts, but should obey God—trusting Him to dispense His blessings wisely, justly, and compassionately.

The actions of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah in this chapter, and those of Abraham and Sarah in chapter 16, raise questions about surrogate parenting.

Today, husbands and wives who cannot have children *naturally*, sometimes choose to secure the services of a third person, who can provide a needed reproductive function, and thereby enable them to have children.

For example, if the wife cannot carry a baby in her womb for a full term pregnancy, some doctors recommend that the couple use the services of another woman. If acceptable, they

⁸⁶⁸Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 413.

⁸⁶⁹Kidner, p. 161.

⁸⁷⁰H. Vos, p. 113.

implant the couple's fertilized egg in her womb, that she agrees to "rent" for the nine-month gestation period. Another example is the securing of sperm from a donor (artificial insemination), if the husband is sterile.

There are many ways in which childless couples can now become parents with this kind of help, from a third, and sometimes a fourth, party. These situations are somewhat similar to what we find in Genesis 16 and 30. The common tie is that, in *all* these cases, someone other than the husband and wife is essential to "service" the conception of the child.

I do not believe that *adoption* is similar to "surrogate parenting," because in adoption, a husband and wife simply "agree" to assume the responsibility of raising someone else's child *as their own*, that has already been or will be born naturally. They do not require a third party for the conception of the child as in surrogate parenting.

9. Jacob's new contract with Laban 30:25-43

Jacob and Laban ("White") made an agreement, which both men felt they could manipulate to their own advantage. However, God sovereignly overruled to bless *Jacob*, as He had promised, in spite of Laban's deceit and Jacob's deviousness (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."⁸⁷¹

Jacob was seemingly relying on a popular superstition, namely, that certain experiences of the mother during pregnancy influenced the condition of her offspring, in order to mislead Laban (vv. 37-39). At least one writer thought that Jacob was mistakenly counting on this custom to ensure fertility among his flocks.

"All marking of the offspring such as that which Jacob thought he was accomplishing in Laban's flocks, is completely impossible. . . . In the placenta and umbilical cord, which constitutes the only connection

⁸⁷¹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 284. Cf. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 212; and Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 257.

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."⁸⁷²

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."⁸⁷³

The herdsmen believed the stronger members of the flock mated in the summer, and the weaker ones in the fall (vv. 41-42).⁸⁷⁴ Jacob's ownership of "camels" (v. 43) proves that he was very rich, since these animals were rare and costly.⁸⁷⁵

Jacob's behavior was *devious* (deceitful and taking advantage), in that he sought to prosper at the expense of his employer. The text records that Jacob became very wealthy ("exceedingly prosperous"; v. 43), but it does not say that his wealth was "a blessing *from God*." God blessed Jacob *in spite of* his actions, not because of them.

Many carnal Christians prosper materially for the same reason. Material prosperity is not necessarily a reward for godliness. Jacob made his own fortune, but the text says that *God made* Abraham "rich" (13:15; 24:35). 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. That is what God usually does.

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

In this chapter, Jacob was motivated to return to Canaan, due to Laban's hostility and encouragement from Leah and Rachel. When Laban overtook Jacob in Gilead, Jacob not only defended his own actions (of leaving with his "share" of the livestock without "giving notice"), but he also accused Laban of deceit. This silenced Laban and led him to request a peace treaty with Jacob.

Jacob's departure for Canaan 31:1-21

God had been faithful in blessing Jacob, as He had promised Abraham and Isaac. Moses recorded the testimony to that fact in this section. Jacob acknowledged that God was responsible for his prosperity. God's goodness and His command to return to the

⁸⁷²Frank L. Marsh, *Studies in Creationism*, pp. 368-69.

⁸⁷³Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 196. Cf. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 502.

⁸⁷⁴See 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.

⁸⁷⁵Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 503.

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, exactly 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 (v. 3) in this passage. It seems likely, however, that this was the same revelation, and was God's second one to Jacob.

In this revelation, Jacob learned that God had been responsible for his becoming richer (v. 12). Jacob credited God with this and with his own survival (vv. 5, 7). This is the first time in the narrative that Jacob emerges as a man of public faith. He finally takes the leadership in his home, and his wives, for the first time, follow his lead.

"This is another case of the 'Ruth effect,' where the foreign wife commits herself and future to the God of her adopted family."⁸⁷⁶

31:1-16 The increasing antagonism of Laban's household ("Jacob has taken away all that was our father's") encouraged Jacob to obey God's command to return to the Promised Land (vv. 1-2).

"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."⁸⁷⁷

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."⁸⁷⁸

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."⁸⁷⁹

These gods were usually small figurines (two to three inches long), sometimes carried on the body as charms, many of which archaeologists

⁸⁷⁶Ibid., p. 510.

⁸⁷⁷Thomas, p. 285.

⁸⁷⁸West, p. 70.

⁸⁷⁹Kitchen, *The Bible* . . . , p. 70. Cf. Barker, p. 135.

have discovered. They may have represented departed ancestors or gods that their makers venerated.⁸⁸⁰ Rachel may also have hoped that these "gods" would make her a fruitful mother.⁸⁸¹ Apparently Laban's family worshipped false gods as well as the true God (cf. Josh. 24:1-3).

"It is curious that Rachel, and not Leah should have almost always turned out to be Jacob's greatest hindrance in life."⁸⁸²

The writer identified Jacob's deception as such (i.e., "Jacob deceived Laban," tricked him) 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 (safely) 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."⁸⁸³

"Whatever wealth Abraham may have forfeited upon leaving the family unit of Terah in Haran comes to his heirs in this most unimaginable way."⁸⁸⁴

31:22-42 God revealed Himself to people other than the patriarchs in those days (Laban, v. 29; cf. Abimelech in 20:3). Many scholars believe that Job also lived in the patriarchal period.

"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)."⁸⁸⁵

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).

⁸⁸⁰See Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 273; K. van der Toorn, "The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990):203-22.

⁸⁸¹See M. Greenberg, "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962):247; Harry A. Hoffner Jr., "The Linguistic Origins of Teraphim," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1967):230-38; Gerhard Mehlman, "Genesis 31:19-39: An Interpretation," *Journal of Reform Judaism* 29:3 (Summer 1982):33-36; and Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 518-19.

⁸⁸²Thomas, p. 285.

⁸⁸³Kidner, p. 165.

⁸⁸⁴Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 517.

⁸⁸⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 430.

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.⁸⁸⁶ Yet Jacob had borne these losses ("I bore the losses myself . . . you required it of my hand"; v. 39). Laban had cheated Jacob.

"God has corked the bottle of his [Laban's] aggressiveness."⁸⁸⁷

"Each of the three patriarchs had to be ingloriously extricated from some adventure."⁸⁸⁸

Note the similarity between Jacob's escape from Laban and his descendants' escape from Egypt in the Exodus.

Jacob believed that he was innocent until proved guilty, but Laban felt he was guilty until proved innocent. "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 (peace treaty), 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. Standing stones (stone pillars) sometimes marked supposed dwelling places of the gods (cf. 28:17-18), and cairns (stone heaps) often marked graves (cf. Josh. 7:26; 8:29; 2 Sam. 18:17).

"Galeed" ("witness heap," v. 47) is the name from which "Gilead" came. "Gilead" became a common name for this mountainous area east of the Jordan River, between the Sea of Galilee (*Cinnereth*, Hebrew for "lyre" denoting the shape of the lake) and the Dead (Salt) Sea (cf. vv. 21, 23, 25).

The so-called "Mizpah [lit. "watchtower," or "outlook point"] blessing" was not really a promise between friends, but a warning between antagonists who did not trust each other (v. 49). They *called on God* to keep each other true to the terms of the covenant they had just made: "May the LORD watch between you and me." They could not check on each other themselves.

"This covenant also might be called a nonaggression pact."⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, p. 277.

⁸⁸⁷Fokkelman, p. 166.

⁸⁸⁸Kidner, p. 165.

⁸⁸⁹H. Vos, p. 122.

"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.'"⁸⁹⁰

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, on the other hand, 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 *angelic* assisting messengers, Jacob divided his people into two groups—as a precaution—when he heard that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men. Furthermore, in addition to praying for God's deliverance, he sought to pacify Esau's anger with an expensive gift.

Jacob had been able to handle his problems himself "by hook or by crook" until now. At this point in his experience, God brought him to the end of his natural resources.

"As Jacob is at the precipice of receiving the promise of Canaan, he is not yet morally ready to carry out the blessing. Jacob must possess his own faith, obtaining the blessing through personal encounter, not by heredity alone."⁸⁹¹

"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

⁸⁹⁰Thomas, p. 287.

⁸⁹¹Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 537.

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."⁸⁹²

- 32:1-2 These "angels" (messengers) must have resembled the angels Jacob had seen at Bethel (28:12), in order for him to have recognized them as angels. They joined his own company of travelers for Jacob's protection (cf. Ps. 34:7). This is the reason for the name "Mahanaim" (i.e., "double host" or "double camp"). Jacob probably saw the "camp of angels (God's camp)" as a source of comfort to his own camp as he prepared to enter the Promised Land.

"Although outside the land of promise, he was not outside the hand of promise."⁸⁹³

- 32:3-12 Why did Jacob initiate contact with Esau (v. 3)?

"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."⁸⁹⁴

Esau may have had a large army ("four hundred men") because he had had to build one in order 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) reflects his deeply felt need for God's help and his own humility (vv. 9-12). One writer likened its form to the penitential psalms.⁸⁹⁵ He reminded God of His past dealings with his forefathers and with himself (v. 9). He confessed his personal

⁸⁹²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 208.

⁸⁹³Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 547.

⁸⁹⁴Thomas, p. 293. Cf. Matt. 5:23-25a.

⁸⁹⁵Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 443.

unworthiness and lack of any claim upon God's favor (v. 10). By calling himself "your servant," Jacob was making himself 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 that he himself could to "appease" his brother (vv. 13-15); he offered his magnanimous gifts *diplomatically* in order 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."⁸⁹⁶

Jacob's ability to give Esau 580 animals proves that God had made him enormously wealthy.

"Jacob's behavioral response was classically narcissistic."⁸⁹⁷

In view of God's many promises of protection, 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."⁸⁹⁸

This site was probably just a few miles east of the Jordan Valley (v. 22). The "Jabbok" (River) joins the Jordan River about midway (north-to-south) between the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee) and the Salt (Dead) Sea.⁸⁹⁹

It was when Jacob was "alone," after having done everything he could to secure his own safety, that God came to him (v. 24). An *unidentified* man assaulted ("wrestled with") Jacob, and he had to fight for his life. The "man" was "the Angel of the LORD" (vv. 28-30; cf. Hos. 12:4). 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

⁸⁹⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 209.

⁸⁹⁷Shepperson, p. 183.

⁸⁹⁸The NET Bible note on 32:22.

⁸⁹⁹On the location and significance of the Jabbok River, see Bryant G. Wood, "Journey Down the Jabbok," *Bible and Spade* (Spring 1978):57-64.

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."⁹⁰⁰

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 fought with God and with men, i.e., who by his wrestling with God overcame men as well."⁹⁰¹

With 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 that was *new for him*. As a sign of this, God gave him a new name that indicated his new relationship to God. "Israel" means "God's Warrior." Jacob's new name introduced a new phase of his life. Thereafter he behaved either carnally or spiritually. Note which of his names Moses used, in each event, from here on: When Jacob behaved like the "old Jacob," Moses referred to him as "Jacob," but when he behaved like the new "Israel" ("God's Warrior"), Moses referred to him as "Israel."

"The acknowledgment of the old name, and its unfortunate suitability [Jacob, v. 27], paves the way for the new name [Israel, v. 28]."⁹⁰²

". . . 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

⁹⁰⁰Kidner, p. 168.

⁹⁰¹Keil and Delitzsch, 1:305-6.

⁹⁰²Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 333.

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."⁹⁰³

"Elohim" ("Very Strong One") occurs here in order to bring out the contrast between God and His creature. Jacob "prevailed," in the sense of obtaining his request, by acknowledging his dependence and cleaving to God as his Deliverer.

"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."⁹⁰⁴

"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?'"⁹⁰⁵

Another view is that God withheld His name in order 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. 16:13; Exod. 33:20; Judg. 13:21-22). Jacob was probably grateful that the Angel had not dealt with him more severely, as he deserved. "Peniel" sounds more like "face of God" in Hebrew than the more common "Penuel," which means the same thing. Perhaps Peniel was an older form of the place name and Penuel a newer form. "Penuel" seems to have been more common (cf. Judg. 8:8). Or perhaps these names describe two places located closely together, though this seems less likely.

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—both physical and spiritual.⁹⁰⁶

"When God touched the strongest sinew of Jacob, the wrestler, it shriveled, and with it Jacob's persistent self-confidence."⁹⁰⁷

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 and trust Him. It is only when we do not believe Him that He must teach us this hard lesson. Sometimes He has to bring us very low to do it. Every Christian should yield himself or herself to the Lordship of God (Christ; Rom. 6:13, 19; 12:1-2).

⁹⁰³Keil and Delitzsch, 1:307.

⁹⁰⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 446.

⁹⁰⁵Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 336.

⁹⁰⁶See Harry Foster, "Walking with a Limp," *Toward the Mark* (September-October 1982):97-100.

⁹⁰⁷Allen P. Ross, "Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:568 (October-December 1985):350.

"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."⁹⁰⁸

To become strong in faith, the believer must forsake self-sufficiency.

"The narrative is presented in a deliberately enigmatic manner to channel the reader's imagination in certain directions."⁹⁰⁹

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"⁹¹⁰

33:1-17 Jacob arranged his family in a marching order that would preserve those who were most precious to him, in case his brother proved to be violently hostile (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."⁹¹¹

Jacob's going ahead of his family 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 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. Jacob's insistence on giving presents to Esau may have been an attempt to give back to Esau the *blessing* that should have been his *in the first place*, in order to undo his sins of earlier years (cf. v. 11).⁹¹²

⁹⁰⁸Thomas, p. 298.

⁹⁰⁹Stephen Geller, "The Struggle at the Jabbok: The Uses of Enigma in a Biblical Narrative," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 14 (1982):39. See also Edward M. Curtis, "Structure, Style and Context as a Key to Interpreting Jacob's Encounter at Peniel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:2 (June 1987):129-37.

⁹¹⁰H. Vos, p. 125.

⁹¹¹The NET Bible note on 33:2.

⁹¹²Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 298-99.

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.⁹¹³ 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."⁹¹⁴

"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 again. Jacob's gift to Esau recalls Abram's gift to Melchizedek (14:20).

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."⁹¹⁵

Previously, Jacob had taken Esau's blessing, but now he gave Esau a blessing (v. 11). 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 been both deceptive and deceived himself.⁹¹⁶ Still another view is that Jacob was returning to the Promised Land on God's orders, and that did not include going to Seir.⁹¹⁷

⁹¹³For 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.

⁹¹⁴Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 345.

⁹¹⁵Kidner, p. 171. Cf. von Rad, pp. 327-28.

⁹¹⁶von Rad, p. 328.

⁹¹⁷Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 299.

His reference to visiting Esau "at Seir" (v. 14) does not mean that Jacob planned to go directly to Seir, where he did not go immediately. He might 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."⁹¹⁸

"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."⁹¹⁹

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 (children and descendants). The Israelites eventually buried Joseph at Shechem (Josh. 24:32). Shechem was only about a mile from the Sychar of Jesus' day (cf. John 4:5, 12).

God had granted Jacob's request by bringing him safely back into the Promised Land (cf. 28:20-21). As he had vowed, Jacob here and now worshipped the God of his father as "his God" ("he erected there an altar"). He called Yahweh "El-Elohe-Israel" meaning, "The Mighty God is The God of Israel." Jacob, in naming the altar, used his own new name, "Israel" (32:29). This was Jacob's first altar, which he built to worship God—just as Abraham had done at Shechem when *he* had first entered Canaan (12:6-7). The altar would have served the double purpose, of both providing a *table* for Jacob's sacrifice, and serving as a *memorial* for Jacob's descendants in the years to come.

⁹¹⁸Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 347.

⁹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 348.

What were Jacob's motivation and his relationship to God when he met Esau? This question rises often in the study of this chapter. The answer is not obvious. Some commentators have felt that Jacob completely backslid and returned to his former lifestyle of self-reliance and deceit.⁹²⁰ Most interpreters attribute good motives to Jacob.⁹²¹ I believe the truth probably lies somewhere between these extremes. It seems to me that Jacob's experience at Peniel had a life-changing impact on him. Jacob seems to be referring to it in 33:10: "I see your face as one sees the face of God."

Nevertheless, Jacob's former lifestyle had become so ingrained—Jacob was over 90 years old at this time—that he could have easily slipped back into his former habits. I believe we have a clue to this in the frequent use of his name "Jacob" in the text from now on, rather than "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 that for us. Rather, it seems to have been the *faithfulness of God*, in sparing Jacob's life and returning him to the Promised Land—as He had promised (28:13-15). The Jacob narrative also contains evidence that God was faithful to bless *others* through Abraham's descendants (12:3), including Laban (cf. 30:27) and Esau (cf. 33:11).

A major lesson of this chapter is, that those who have received God's grace may trust in God's promise of protection when they seek reconciliation with others.

14. The rape of Dinah and the revenge of Simeon and Levi ch. 34

After Shechem the Canaanite raped Dinah, Simeon and Levi plotted and took revenge by deceiving the Shechemites into getting circumcised as the condition for Dinah's marriage. Then, to get their full revenge, they murdered the 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."⁹²²

Contrast Jacob's great distress, upon hearing that Joseph had apparently been killed (37:34-35), with his lack of response upon hearing that Dinah had been raped. He favored Rachel's children terribly.

"The story is a tangled skein of good and evil, as are all the patriarchal narratives."⁹²³

⁹²⁰E.g., Thomas, pp. 309-16.

⁹²¹E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, 1:307-11; Aalders, pp. 148-53.

⁹²²Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 458.

⁹²³Ross, "Genesis," p. 83.

Dinah must have been a teenager at this time. Keil and Delitzsch calculated from other references in Genesis that she was between 13 and 15, and Davis wrote that she was 15 or 16.⁹²⁴

34:1-17 Here is another instance of a man seeing a woman and taking her for himself (cf. 6:2).

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]."⁹²⁵

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. The Hivites negotiated in good faith, but the Jacobites renegotiated treacherously (vv.13-17; cf. Prov. 3:29; Amos 1:9).

"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."⁹²⁶

34:18-31 We can explain the agreement of "the men of their city," including both "Hamor" (meaning "donkey," a valued and respected animal) and "Shechem" (v. 18), to undergo circumcision. Other nations besides Jacob's family practiced this rite, at this time in history, as an act of consecration.⁹²⁷ Jacob was not suggesting that these men convert from one

⁹²⁴Keil and Delitzsch, 1:311; Davis, p. 256.

⁹²⁵Aalders, p. 156.

⁹²⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 312-13.

⁹²⁷Keil and Delitzsch, 1:313-14.

religion to another.⁹²⁸ 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."⁹²⁹

Dinah, Simeon, and Levi were the children of Jacob and Leah, the "unloved wife" (v. 25). Simeon and Levi doubtless felt closer to Dinah, being "blood-brothers," than some of her half-brothers did, for this reason. But Reuben, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun were also Leah's children, and thus Dinah's full brothers. The fact that *only* Simeon and Levi reacted as they did, against the men of Shechem, suggests that they responded with excessive recklessness.⁹³⁰ Perhaps Jacob's indifference to Dinah's plight, evidenced by his lack of action, encouraged the violent overreaction of her brothers.⁹³¹ While Simeon and Levi took the lead in this atrocity, *all* of Jacob's sons evidently participated with them in the *looting* of the city (v. 27; cf. vv. 28-29). This was only the first of several notorious incidents that took place at Shechem (cf. Judg. 9:30-49; Jer. 41:4-8; Hos. 6:9).

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.

"His [Jacob's] censure is more a peevish complaint."⁹³²

"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."⁹³³

Deception proceeded to murder and pillage. As a result of this sin, Jacob later passed over Simeon and Levi when he gave his 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."⁹³⁴

⁹²⁸J. Milgrom, "Religious Conversion and the Revolt Model for the Formation of Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982):173.

⁹²⁹Kidner, p. 174.

⁹³⁰Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 590.

⁹³¹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 308-10.

⁹³²von Rad, p. 334.

⁹³³Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 371.

⁹³⁴Keil and Delitzsch, 1:315.

"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."⁹³⁵

It is interesting that Simeon and Levi referred to Dinah as "our sister" (v. 31), rather than as "Jacob's (your) daughter," which would have been the most 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. This is an early indication that Jacob's family was already crumbling dysfunctionally, which becomes obvious when Joseph's brothers turn on him, sell him as a slave, and lie to their father (37:12-36).

The significance of this chapter is fourfold at least:

1. It explains why Jacob passed over Simeon and Levi for special blessing.
2. It shows the importance of keeping the chosen seed separate from the Canaanites.⁹³⁶

"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."⁹³⁷

Noah's curse on Canaan and his seed had warned the rest of humanity that bad things would happen to people who mixed with the Canaanites (cf. 9:25-27).

"People who live on the borderland between church and world are like those who lived in the old days on the borders between England and Scotland—they are never safe."⁹³⁸

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.

⁹³⁵Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 316. Cf. 19:8.

⁹³⁶See Calum M. Carmichael, "Forbidden Mixtures," *Vetus Testamentum* 32:4 (1982):394–415.

⁹³⁷Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 569.

⁹³⁸Thomas, p. 325.

"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."⁹³⁹

"What message does such a sordid episode have in the Jacob-Joseph narratives? At this point forward, Genesis turns its attention to Jacob's sons, the progenitors of Israel's twelve tribes. After the tension of the Jacob-Esau struggle was alleviated in chap. 33's account of the twin's pacification, the author sets out to demonstrate the seedy character of Jacob's descendants, raising the specter that the promises are again in peril."⁹⁴⁰

Abraham had dealt honorably with the Hittites (ch. 23), and Isaac had behaved peacefully with the Philistines (26:12-33). But now, Jacob's sons became the *aggressors* in a conflict with the Hivites. Simeon and Levi's unrepentant treachery stands in stark contrast to Esau and Jacob's recent moral transformations. In contrast to the Isaac incident in chapter 27, this chapter contains no prayer, no divine revelation, no promised blessing, and no explicit mention of God.⁹⁴¹

Younger zealots, such as Simeon and Levi, can sometimes bring reproach on God's covenant through their misguided zeal. This can happen when spiritual leaders such as Jacob are indifferent to pagan defilement, and fail to act decisively against it.⁹⁴²

". . . 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."⁹⁴³

Many believers bring the wrath of unbelievers on themselves and on other believers by their ungodly behavior, as Jacob, Simeon, and Levi did.

⁹³⁹Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 200; and idem, "Genesis," p. 214.

⁹⁴⁰Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 576-77.

⁹⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 578.

⁹⁴²For 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.

⁹⁴³Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 318.

15. Jacob's return to Bethel ch. 35

After God reminded Jacob of his previous commitment to Him (28:20-22), the patriarch returned to Bethel to worship Yahweh, bringing closure to the past. There the Lord reconfirmed the promises to him, and completed his family with the birth of Benjamin. However, Jacob also experienced three deaths, and rebellion against himself by Reuben. The deaths of Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac signal the end of an era.

Jacob's renewed consecration to Yahweh 35:1-8

About 10 years had passed since Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, but he had not yet returned to Bethel to fulfill his vow there (28:20-22). He should have headed there immediately after making peace with Esau, rather than settling near Shechem. His negligence evidently was due in part to the continuing presence of the idols that Rachel—and probably others—had brought from Haran. Perhaps *their* allegiance to these gods had restrained Jacob's total commitment to Yahweh (cf. 1 Kings 11:3-4).

God appeared to Jacob (the fourth time), and commanded him now to fulfill his vow (v. 1). This revelation encouraged Jacob to stop procrastinating. This is the first and only time God commanded a patriarch to build an altar. This 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, Jacob purged his household of idolatry—by literally burying Rachel's idols, along with all the other objects associated with the worship of these gods. He also purified 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."⁹⁴⁴

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.)."⁹⁴⁵

God blessed Jacob for his commitment, expressed in his burying the idols ("foreign gods") and earrings ("rings which were in their ears"; perhaps taken from the Shechemites), by placing the fear ("a great terror") of Jacob's family in the hearts of the Canaanites, whom they passed on their way to Bethel (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.

⁹⁴⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 217.

⁹⁴⁵Kidner, 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."⁹⁴⁶

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 she may have joined him later, after the death of Rebekah. The reference to Deborah is probably a way of reminding the reader of *Rebekah*, and of alluding to *her death* in a veiled manner.⁹⁴⁷ This may have been appropriate in view of Rebekah's deception of Isaac (ch. 27).⁹⁴⁸

Yahweh's reconfirmation of the covenant 35:9-15

God then appeared again to Jacob at Bethel (the fifth revelation), after Jacob had fulfilled his vow to God and built an altar there (vv. 9-12). This revelation came 30 years after the first one to Jacob at Bethel. In this case, God appeared in *visible* (bodily?) form ("God went up from him in that place," v. 13). In the former instance, Jacob had seen a vision. God now confirmed Jacob's name change (cf. 32:28). This new name, "Israel," was a pledge from God that He would do what He now promised Jacob: to give him numerous descendants and the whole land of Canaan.⁹⁴⁹ 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 . . ."⁹⁵⁰

God's use of His name "God Almighty" (*El Shaddai*) is significant in view of what God promised Jacob. It would take an omnipotent God to fulfill these promises (cf. 17:1-2). God expanded the former promises, and added to the significance of the name "Israel" (vv. 10-11; cf. 28:4, 13-15; 31:3, 13; 32:12, 28).

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 Jacob's descendants. He not only set

⁹⁴⁶Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 377.

⁹⁴⁷Gary A. Rendsburg, "Notes on Genesis XXXV," *Vetus Testamentum* 34:3 (July 1984):361-65.

⁹⁴⁸Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 473.

⁹⁴⁹See Chee-Chiew Lee, "[Goim] in Genesis 35:11 and the Abrahamic Promise of Blessings for the Nations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:3 (September 2009):467-82.

⁹⁵⁰Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 203. Cf. idem, "Genesis," pp. 217-18.

the stone apart as *special* by pouring "oil" on it, as he had done 30 years earlier, but also made an ("a drink") "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."⁹⁵¹

God's blessing of Jacob when his dedication was complete illustrates the LORD's response to those who fully obey Him.

"The importance of God's words to Jacob in vv. 11-12 cannot be overemphasized. First, God's words 'be fruitful and increase in number' recalled clearly the primeval blessing of Creation (1:28) and hence showed God to be still 'at work' in bringing about the blessing to all mankind through Jacob. Second, for the first time since 17:16 ('kings of peoples will come from her'), the mention is made of royalty ('kings,' v. 11) in the promised line. Third, the promise of the land, first given to Abraham and then to Isaac, was renewed here with Jacob (v. 12). Thus within these brief words several major themes of the book have come together. The primeval blessing of mankind was renewed through the promise of a royal offspring and the gift of the land."⁹⁵²

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."⁹⁵³

Still, all of Jacob's problems were not behind him.

"Just as Abraham had two sons and only one was the son of promise, and just as Isaac had two sons and only one was the son of the blessing, so now Jacob, though he has twelve sons, has two wives (Leah and Rachel); and each has a son (Judah and Joseph) that can rightfully contend for the blessing. In the narratives that follow, the writer holds both sons, Joseph

⁹⁵¹Kidner, p. 174.

⁹⁵²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 218.

⁹⁵³Thomas, pp. 331, 336.

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)."⁹⁵⁴

The birth of Benjamin, death of Rachel, and sin of Reuben 35:16-29

Was Jacob disobedient to God when he left Bethel? God had told him to go to Bethel and "live there" ("dwell" [NKJV] or "settle [HCSB] there," v. 1). This may have been a command to "dwell" there *temporarily*, while he fulfilled his vow. On the other hand, God may have wanted Jacob to establish permanent residence, to "settle there." This seems unlikely, however, since Jacob remained a semi-nomad.

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."⁹⁵⁵ *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, at least over Rachel's sons. Benjamin was born on land that later became part of his tribe's allotment.

Jacob buried Rachel somewhere between Bethel and "Ephrath," an older name for "Bethlehem" (House of Bread; vv. 19-20). Both Bethlehem and Kiriath-jearim became known as Ephrath(a), because the clan of Ephrath settled in both places (cf. 1 Chron. 2:50). Later references suggest that Jacob buried Rachel at or near Ramah, which was south of Bethel and north of Jerusalem and Bethlehem (cf. 1 Sam. 10:2-3; Jer. 31:15).⁹⁵⁶ Since the fourth century B.C., another site, still covered with a mausoleum a mile north of Bethlehem, has been venerated as the burial place of Rachel.

The record of Benjamin's birth and Rachel's death demonstrates God's faithfulness in providing seed. It also gives the origin (etiology) of the tribe of Benjamin, and it shows Rachel's important place in the growth of the chosen family.

The opening section of the Isaac *toledot* (25:19-26) contained the record of two births: Esau's and Jacob's. Its closing section (35:16-29) documented two deaths: Deborah's and Rachel's. Ironically Rachel, who had cried in desperation to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die" (30:1), died giving birth to a child.

The "Tower of Eder" ("Migdal-eder") was simply a watchtower, built to help shepherds protect their flocks from robbers (v. 21; cf. 2 Kings 18:8;

⁹⁵⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 218.

⁹⁵⁵See James Muilenberg, "The Birth of Benjamin," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75 (1956):194-201.

⁹⁵⁶Edersheim, *Sketches of . . .*, p. 60.

2 Chron. 26:10; 27:4). Since the time of Jerome, the early church father who lived in Bethlehem, tradition has held that *this* "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.⁹⁵⁷ 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.

"Taking the concubine of one's predecessor was a perverted way of claiming to be the new lord of the bride."⁹⁵⁸

Reuben's act, therefore, manifested *rebellion* against Jacob's authority, as well as unbridled lust. It resulted in his losing the birthright. "Judah" then obtained the right to rule as head of the family, and "Levi" eventually got the right to be the family priest. The double portion of his father Jacob's inheritance went to "Joseph," who realized it through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. 1 Chron. 5:1-2).

"At an early stage in the narrative Reuben had played some small part in the all too brief restoration to his mother of her conjugal rights (Gen. XXX. 14ff.), but now, at the end of the Jacob narrative, it is by his agency that the supplanter is well and truly supplanted."⁹⁵⁹

As at Shechem, Jacob appears to have 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.

⁹⁵⁷Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 327.

⁹⁵⁸Jordan, p. 65.

⁹⁵⁹George G. Nicol, "Genesis XXIX. 32 and XXXV. 22a: Reuben's Reversal," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31:2 (October 1980):538.

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, possibly a synecdoche.

35:28-29 With the record of Jacob entering into his father's inheritance, the history of Isaac's life concludes. He died several years later, and was buried in the "cave of Machpelah" near Hebron (49:29-31). Isaac lived for 12 years after Jacob's relocation to Hebron. He probably shared Jacob's grief over the apparent death of Joseph, but died shortly before Joseph's promotion in Egypt.⁹⁶⁰

"The end of the Jacob narratives is marked by the death of his father, Isaac. The purpose of this notice is not simply to record Isaac's death but rather to show the complete fulfillment of God's promise to Jacob (28:21). According to Jacob's vow, he had asked that God watch over him during his sojourn and return him safely to the house of his father. Thus the conclusion of the narrative marks the final fulfillment of these words as Jacob returned to the house of his father, Isaac, before he died."⁹⁶¹

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. It also provides 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. This list also includes earlier inhabitants, of the area later known as *Edom* (lit. "Red"), whom Esau brought under his control.⁹⁶²

We can divide this chapter as follows:

⁹⁶⁰See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:320, for a chronology of these events.

⁹⁶¹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 220.

⁹⁶²The NET Bible note on 36:1.

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).⁹⁶³ 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*.⁹⁶⁴

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.

"That there are two *toledot* headings for Esau makes his treatment in two consecutive sections exceptional in the book. The first section [36:1-8] focuses on family and homeland, and the second [36:9—37:1] centers on his offspring as a developing nation. These two sections are flanked by the major narrative *toledot* sections of Isaac (25:19—35:29) and Jacob (37:2—50:26)."⁹⁶⁵

The Kenazites (vv. 11, 15) later affiliated with the tribe of Judah.⁹⁶⁶ The Amalekites separated from the other Edomites, and became an independent people early in their history (v. 12).⁹⁶⁷ 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 after him (1 Sam. 27:8; 30:1; 2 Sam 8:12). Some Simeonites finally exterminated them during Hezekiah's reign (1 Chron. 4:42-43).

"What is most interesting about the king list [vv. 31-39] is that it reflects an elective kingship rather than a dynastic one. . . .

⁹⁶³For an explanation, see Keil and Delitzsch, 1:321-22.

⁹⁶⁴E.g., Speiser, p. 283; and Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 223.

⁹⁶⁵Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 632.

⁹⁶⁶J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, pp. 391-92.

⁹⁶⁷See the chart illustrating their family relationship among my comments on 25:1-6.

"These 'kings' may have indeed been charismatic individuals who, like the judges, assumed their office without regard to heredity."⁹⁶⁸

This list of Edomite kings (vv. 31-39) 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."⁹⁶⁹

"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)."⁹⁷⁰

Verse 31 is probably a post-Mosaic explanation, written after Israel had kings, to show that the Edomites were also a powerful people with kings, even before there were kings in Israel.⁹⁷¹ This is further proof of God's blessing on Esau, one of Abraham's descendants.

Jacob was living at Hebron when Joseph's brothers sold him, and he may have continued living there until he moved to Egypt ("the land where his father had sojourned," 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."⁹⁷²

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.

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

⁹⁶⁸Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 400.

⁹⁶⁹Davis, 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.

⁹⁷⁰Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 397.

⁹⁷¹Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 656.

⁹⁷²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 225. Cf. Heb. 11:39.

replaces him as the focus of the writer's attention at this point.⁹⁷³ These chapters are not entirely about Joseph, however. The writer showed interest in all the sons of Jacob, and among them, especially Judah.⁹⁷⁴

"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."⁹⁷⁵

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]."⁹⁷⁶

"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."⁹⁷⁷

Patterson concluded that the genre of the Joseph story in chapters 37—50 is a "court narrative." He provided many observations on the narrative features of the story.⁹⁷⁸

"The Joseph story, though different in style from that of the patriarchs, continues the theme of the patriarchal narratives—God overcomes obstacles to the fulfillment of the promise."⁹⁷⁹

Albright commented on the Joseph narrative from a literary point of view:

"Nothing in the ancient Near East can equal the dramatic portrayal of Joseph's career—Jacob's grief, Joseph's purity and generosity, the shame and remorse of his brethren."⁹⁸⁰

Wolf's observation was theological:

⁹⁷³For 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.

⁹⁷⁴See Bryan Smith, "The Central Role of Judah in Genesis 37—50," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:646 (April-June 2005):158-74.

⁹⁷⁵Aalders, 2:179.

⁹⁷⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 344.

⁹⁷⁷Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 293.

⁹⁷⁸Richard D. Patterson, "Joseph in Pharaoh's Court," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:654 (April-June 2007):148-64.

⁹⁷⁹Longman and Dillard, p. 60.

⁹⁸⁰Albright, *Archaeology and . . .*, p. 23.

"Rarely has God's providence been so evident in such an extended passage."⁹⁸¹

The books of Ruth and Esther also emphasize divine providence. 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, through a dream, 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. David also tended sheep in preparation for his role as a leader of people.

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," and her sons "hated" (cf. 29:31, 33).

"Son of his old age" means "wise son," or "son of wisdom." Joseph was "old" (mature) for his years; he had the wisdom of age in his youth. Joseph was born when Jacob was 91 years old, but he was not Jacob's youngest son. One of Joseph's brothers was younger than he: 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."⁹⁸²

⁹⁸¹Wolf, p. 121.

⁹⁸²Thomas, p. 356.

During a visit to Lebanon, I observed a gentleman with a very long fingernail on his fifth finger. I later learned that it identified him as a man who did not have to work with his hands, which would have been impossible with such a long fingernail. This is similar to what Joseph's "tunic" said about his status, though, of course, Joseph *did* do manual labor.

Such a garment as Joseph wore identified the possessor of the *birthright*. This sign of Jacob's love for Joseph constantly irritated the jealous brothers. Sibling rivalry continues to mark Genesis, from Cain and Abel, to Jacob and Esau, to Joseph and his brothers.

"Jacob's partiality for Rachel and for her two sons doomed his family to the same strife he had experienced in his father's household."⁹⁸³

"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."⁹⁸⁴

37:5-11 Joseph's "dreams" were revelations from God (cf. 40:8; 41:16, 25, 28). Joseph, his brothers, and his father did not grasp their significance fully until God brought them to pass. Joseph regarded his dreams as important, however, and therefore did not hesitate to make them known to his family.

"This is the first dream in the Bible in which God does not speak (cf. 20:3; 28:12-15; 31:11, 24). It forms a transition in the dominant means of God's revelation from theophany in Genesis 1—11, to dreams and visions in Genesis 12—35, and now to providence in Genesis 36—50. These three stages resemble the three parts of TaNaK (i.e., the OT). In the *Torah* ('Law'), God speaks to Moses in theophany; in the *Nebiim* ('Prophets'), he speaks in dreams and visions; and in the *Ketubim* ('Writings'), he works mostly through providence."⁹⁸⁵

In the first "dream" (v. 7), God revealed that Joseph's brothers would come to him for *bread* or *food*, symbolized by the sheaves of grain. 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.

⁹⁸³Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 689.

⁹⁸⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 499.

⁹⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 500.

In the second dream (v. 9), which was even grander, Joseph was himself supreme over the *whole house of Israel*, symbolized by the "sun and moon and eleven stars." The repetition of the main point of the dream confirmed that what God predicted would certainly happen (cf. 41:32). 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, especially close family members.

"Joseph is depicted as morally good but immature and bratty. His tattling, boasting, and robe parading inflames his brother's hatred against him."⁹⁸⁶

"God's future agent and mouthpiece in Egypt could hardly make a worse impression on his first appearance: spoiled brat, talebearer, braggart."⁹⁸⁷

Textual references cannot establish whether Joseph at this time realized that his dreams were divine prophecies or not. People often regarded dreams as "divine revelations" in the ancient East.⁹⁸⁸ If Joseph did so, the fact that he related them boldly to his family may indicate his faith.⁹⁸⁹

"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."⁹⁹⁰

God chooses faithful, righteous individuals for positions of leadership, but those chosen may experience the jealous hatred of their brethren.

"Divine sovereignty is not a rigid detailed blueprint that manipulates and straitjackets human behavior."⁹⁹¹

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 thereby render his dreams impossible to fulfill. For practical reasons, they decided to sell him, and to deceive Jacob into thinking that a wild beast had killed him. In spite of their plan, however, God kept Joseph alive and safe in Egypt.

⁹⁸⁶Ibid., p. 498.

⁹⁸⁷Sternberg, p. 98.

⁹⁸⁸Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 600.

⁹⁸⁹Cf. Erdman, p. 113.

⁹⁹⁰Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 410.

⁹⁹¹Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 692.

Ironically, by selling Joseph into Egypt, his brothers *actualized* the dreams they sought to subvert. The focus of this pericope is deceit, which is a recurring feature of the Jacob and Joseph narratives.

37:12-17 It was not uncommon for shepherds to lead their flocks many miles from home in search of pasture. "Shechem" was about 60 miles north of Hebron. Jacob owned land there (33:19). "Dothan" was 17 miles farther north.

37:18-24 The extreme measures that Joseph's brothers considered, in order to "silence" him, have led some commentators to conclude that it was not just personal hatred springing from jealousy that motivated them (cf. Cain, 4:9). They may have actually wanted to alter the will of God as revealed in Joseph's dreams, as well.

"The brothers' hate is therefore a rebellion against the matter contained in the dreams, against the divine power itself, standing behind them, who had given the dreams. The expression usually translated by 'the dreamer' [v. 19] means much more than our English word, namely, the one empowered to prophetic dreams."⁹⁹²

Reuben, as the firstborn, looked after his father's interests, and, knowing what sorrow Joseph's death would bring to Jacob, sought to spare Joseph's life and release him from the pit later. Perhaps Reuben wanted to get back in the good graces of his father (cf. 35:22). Joseph's place of confinement, a "pit," was evidently a dry ("empty . . . without any water") well or cistern (cf. 40:15).

37:25-28 "Dothan" lay on a caravan route that ran from Damascus to Egypt.⁹⁹³ The next time the brothers would "eat a meal" in Joseph's presence, he would be sitting "at the head" of the head table (43:32-34).

Moses referred to the "traders" that bought Joseph as both "Ishmaelites" (vv. 25, 27, 28) and "Midianites" (v. 28). Probably the "caravan" contained a mixture of *both* of these groups of Abraham's descendants, who made their living as nomadic 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.⁹⁹⁴ Alternatively, "Ishmaelites" may designate a league of

⁹⁹²von Rad, p. 353.

⁹⁹³See 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.

⁹⁹⁴Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 423.

tribes, with the "Midianites" constituting just one element (cf. 25:13-17).⁹⁹⁵ Rather than being agents of death, the traders proved to be God's instruments of deliverance.

"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 firstborn, 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 ("20 *shekels* of silver") was the same price that God later specified, under the Mosaic Law, that Israelites should pay for a slave between the ages of five and 20 years (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.⁹⁹⁶

"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."⁹⁹⁷

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."⁹⁹⁸

37:29-36 Reuben was absent during the sale of Joseph. When he returned and found Joseph missing, he felt great distress ("he tore his garments"). Jacob would have held *him* responsible for Joseph's safety, since Reuben was the oldest of the brothers. Joseph's brothers tried to cover one sin with another.

"The message accompanying the cloak [v. 32] has a certain blunt brutality about it. They did not try to soften the blow."⁹⁹⁹

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).

⁹⁹⁵Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 355.

⁹⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 356.

⁹⁹⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 508.

⁹⁹⁸Keil and Delitzsch, 1:332.

⁹⁹⁹Leupold, 2:973.

Had Jacob believed more strongly in God's revelations through Joseph's dreams, he might not have jumped to the conclusion that Joseph was dead, and his sorrow might not have been as great (cf. 2 Sam. 18:33). Jacob's fears were groundless, but he did not realize this because he chose, in this instance, to live by sight rather than by faith.

The *Pharaoh* referred to (v. 36) was probably Ammenemes II (1929–1895 B.C.), and the capital of Egypt during this period (the twelfth dynasty) was Memphis. This was where Joseph was taken. "Potiphar," as Pharaoh's "bodyguard captain," would have been in charge of the king's executioners, who carried out the capital sentences ordered by Pharaoh. "Potiphar" is a shortened form of "Potiphera" (41:45), meaning "He Whom *Ra* [the sun-god] Has Given" (emphasis added). The meaning of the Hebrew word *saris*, translated in verse 36 "officer" or "official," changed in meaning in the first millennium B.C. to "eunuch."¹⁰⁰⁰ Josephus called Potiphar Pharaoh's chief cook, which may or may not have been correct.¹⁰⁰¹

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)."¹⁰⁰²

"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."¹⁰⁰³

¹⁰⁰⁰Kitchen, *Ancient Orient* . . . , pp. 115-66.

¹⁰⁰¹Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . . , 2:4:1 and 2:5:4. See Magen Broshi, "The Credibility of Josephus," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1982):379-384.

¹⁰⁰²Thomas, pp. 361-62.

¹⁰⁰³H. Vos, p. 134.

"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.'"¹⁰⁰⁴

Joseph's motives are not completely clear in the text. Consequently, students of his life have made judgments about his character, that are both positive and negative. Most have concluded that he was one of the greatest men in history.¹⁰⁰⁵ A few have contested this view, and believed that he was selfish and manipulative.¹⁰⁰⁶ I believe the textual evidence favors the former view, primarily, though some of Joseph's early actions seem to have been unwise, at best, and arrogant at worst.

People who serve faithfully "as unto the Lord" often experience severe persecution, but God will preserve them so that they can fulfill their God-given destiny.

3. Judah and Tamar ch. 38

This chapter at first seems out of place, since it interrupts the story of Joseph, but we must remember that this is the *toledot* of Jacob. This is the story of what happened to his whole family, not just Joseph. The central problem with which the chapter deals is *childlessness*. The events of the chapter must span at least 20 years, a long period during which Joseph was lost to his family (cf. 37:2; 41:46-47; 45:6).

Judah tried unsuccessfully to ensure the "*levirate* rights" of his daughter-in-law "Tamar" (whose name means "Palm"). As a last resort to obtain her legally rightful child, Tamar deceived Judah into having sexual intercourse with her by masquerading as a prostitute. She thereby fulfilled her right to become the mother of Judah's children, and gave birth to twins, 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."¹⁰⁰⁷

This chapter records the compromise of the Israelites, specifically "Judah," with the two Canaanites—Shua and Tamar—resulting in the confusion of seed: the chosen people mixing with the condemned. This is the first time one of the chosen seed selected a wife

¹⁰⁰⁴Thomas, p. 355.

¹⁰⁰⁵See Thomas Mann's 1,600-page *Joseph and His Brothers*.

¹⁰⁰⁶E.g., Maurice Samuel, *Certain People of the Book*; idem, "Joseph—The Brilliant Failure," *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1986):38-51, 68.

¹⁰⁰⁷Keil and Delitzsch, 1:338-39.

outside the preferred families of the patriarchs. Like Esau, Judah chose a wife from the "women of the land," even one of the accursed Canaanites (cf. 24:3-4; 27:46—28:2). This shocking and shameful story is perhaps the basis for the prohibition against mixing various kinds of seed, yoking two different kinds of animals together, weaving two kinds of thread into cloth, etc., in the Mosaic Law.¹⁰⁰⁸

"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."¹⁰⁰⁹

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).¹⁰¹⁰ 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).

"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.'"¹⁰¹¹

Onan's refusal to give Tamar a child not only demonstrated a lack of love for his deceased brother; it also revealed Onan's *selfish heart*, that wanted *for himself* what would legally have gone to his elder brother's heir. If Tamar had borne him a son, that child would have been the *perpetuator* of Er's name, legacy, family line, and inheritance, as well as that of Onan—and thereby would have fulfilled his "duty" to "raise up offspring" (cf. Ruth 4:5, 21-22).

God judged Onan's sin severely, because descendants were important in His plans for the Israelite patriarchs, not because he practiced "birth control." God leaves the choice of *how many* children we have—and *when*—up to us, though He sovereignly controls this, of course. Onan was frustrating the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. 11:4). This is the first text that explicitly states that God put someone to death ("took his life [twice] vv. 7, 10).

Judah sinned against Tamar by forcing her to live as "a widow" (v. 11). This was because he wrongly blamed Tamar for the deaths of his sons (cf. v. 26), rather than blaming his sons. But Tamar had every right to children

¹⁰⁰⁸Cf. Carmichael, pp. 394–415.

¹⁰⁰⁹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18–50*, p. 433.

¹⁰¹⁰de Vaux, pp. 37-38. See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 705-10, for an excursus on levirate marriage.

¹⁰¹¹Kidner, p. 188.

by virtue of her lawful marriages. Moreover, as a member of the chosen family, Judah should have made certain that she had another legitimate opportunity to bear children.

Judah comes across at the beginning of this incident, again, as a hard and callous man. He had previously suggested selling Joseph into slavery, in order to make money off of him, and deceiving Jacob—despite Reuben's protests (37:26-27, 29-30). Now the writer portrayed him as showing *no grief* over the tragic deaths of his sons, in contrast to Jacob, who mourned inconsolably over Joseph's *apparent* death (37:34-35). Judah also ordered the *burning* of his daughter-in-law (38:24)!

38:12-30 When Judah deceived Jacob (37:31-32), "a goat" and *an item of clothing* featured in the trick, and here, again, "a goat" and *an item of clothing* play in Tamar's deception of Judah. Tamar's strategy for obtaining her right was not commendable. She played the role of a common prostitute (Heb. *zona*). Judah's Canaanite friend described her as a "shrine prostitute" later (v. 21, Heb. *qedesa*, lit. "holy woman," i.e., a woman used in the worship of pagan religion), but he probably said this to elevate her social status in the eyes of the other men he was addressing.

Though ancient Near Eastern society condemned adultery, it permitted prostitution.¹⁰¹² By wearing a veil, Tamar hid her identity from Judah, but at the same time presented herself as a *betrothed* (to Shelah) woman, since engaged women wore veils (cf. 24:65; 29:21-25). However, the fact that she sought to obtain seed by Judah shows her legitimate desire for children, at least. It 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."¹⁰¹³

"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."¹⁰¹⁴

¹⁰¹²*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1992 ed., s.v. "Prostitution (OT)," by E. A. Goodfriend. See also Edward Lipinski, "Cult Prostitution in Ancient Israel," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 40:1 (January/February 2014):46-56, 70.

¹⁰¹³Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 612.

¹⁰¹⁴Aalders, 2:194.

Moses did not clarify Tamar's motivation. Whether or not she understood and believed the promises to the patriarchs regarding their sacred vocation, she did become an ancestress of the Messiah (Ruth 4:18-22; Matt. 1:3, 16).

"Just as in chapter 20 where the seed of Abraham was protected by the 'righteous' (*saddiq*, 20:4; NIV, 'innocent') Abimelech (cf. also 26:9-11), it is the woman Tamar, not Judah the patriarch, who is ultimately responsible for the survival of the descendants of the house of Judah."¹⁰¹⁵

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 Tamar, his *daughter-in-law*. It is evidently because his repentance was genuine, that Jacob did not exclude him from receiving a special blessing, as he would later exclude Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Because Judah humbled himself, God raised him up to be the "Chief" of the house of Israel, and blessed the children that he fathered—even though they were a result of his sin! Compare God's blessing of Solomon *despite the fact* that he was the fruit of the unlawful union of David and Bathsheba.

"The scene marks the beginning of Judah's transformation when he declares of Tamar, 'She is righteous, not I' (lit., 38:26)."¹⁰¹⁶

". . . 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."¹⁰¹⁷

"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 the Messiah (Ruth 4:18-22; Matt. 1:3, 16). Moses may have included the unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of these twins, in order to emphasize God's *selection of the son* through whom the line of blessing would descend.

¹⁰¹⁵Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 232.

¹⁰¹⁶Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 506.

¹⁰¹⁷Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 364.

"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."¹⁰¹⁸

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 (cf. Mic. 2:13). 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."¹⁰¹⁹

The only mothers in the Bible who bore twins were Rebekah and Tamar.

"As the Jacob narrative began with an account of the struggle of the twins Jacob and Esau (25:22), so now the conclusion of the Jacob narrative is marked by a similar struggle of twins. In both cases the struggle resulted in a reversal of the right of the firstborn and the right of the blessing. . . . The brevity and austerity with which the narrative is recounted leaves the impression that the meaning of the passage is self-evident to the reader. Indeed, coming as it does on the heels of a long series of reversals in which the younger gains the upper hand on the elder, its sense is transparent."¹⁰²⁰

Judah's hedonistic willfulness, in this chapter, contrasts with Joseph's self-control in sexual temptation in the next. Here, promiscuous Judah grasps Tamar's seductive offer, and enlarges his family. Later, chaste Joseph resists Potiphar's wife's seductive offer, and ends his career (temporarily) in prison. This chapter also: provides the *etiology* of the tribe of Judah, helps the reader appreciate the Canaanite threat to Israel's purity, and helps us appreciate Jacob's later willingness to leave Canaan to join Joseph in Egypt.

¹⁰¹⁸Ross, "Genesis," p. 89. See also the NET Bible note on 38:29.

¹⁰¹⁹Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 506-7.

¹⁰²⁰Sailhamer, "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., punishment exactly the same as the crime) 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 after being 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."¹⁰²¹

"Rhetorically, the Joseph narrative often couples events, especially the double dreams of Joseph (chap. 37), the duo of the baker and butler (ch. 40), and the two dreams of Pharaoh (chap. 41). After the Judah-Tamar incident, chap. 39 provides the second story of a patriarch's temptation by a married woman."¹⁰²²

Both of the seductresses were non-Israelites.

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. The divine name "LORD," Yahweh, 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. God had previously promised to be with Isaac and Jacob (26:3, 24, 28; 28:15, 20; 31:3). "Yahweh" is the name for God used in this story. The *covenant-keeping God* of the patriarchs "was with" this son of Jacob far from home. Joseph had a fine physique and a "handsome" face, features that he seems to have inherited from his mother Rachel (cf. 29:17). He proved faithful in *a little*, and therefore the LORD placed him in charge of *much* ("he [Potiphar] made him [Joseph] overseer over his house, and all that he owned"; cf. Luke 16:10). Note that God "blessed" Potiphar ("the Egyptian's house," Potiphar's family) "because (on account) 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

¹⁰²¹Thomas, p. 369. Cf. James 1:2-4.

¹⁰²²Mathews, Genesis 11:27—50:26, p. 725.

precisely because of the one whom Yahweh assists. The power inherent in the blessing is expansive . . ."1023

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).¹⁰²⁴ Joseph regarded obedience to God as his primary responsibility (v. 9), and therefore chose as he did (cf. Ps. 51:4).

Note that Potiphar's wife's invitation was for Joseph to lie "beside" (Heb. *'esel*) her (v. 10; cf. vv. 15, 16, 18; 41:3), not to lie "with" her, the more common phrase that describes sexual intercourse (cf. 34:7; 39:14). Evidently she invited his physical familiarity, which she hoped would lead to intercourse. Joseph, realizing where this first step might lead, wisely set a boundary for himself and refused even to be alone with her ("left his garment in her hand and fled . . . outside," vv. 10-12).¹⁰²⁵

"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."¹⁰²⁶

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 also see it in his

¹⁰²³Westermann, *Genesis 36—50*, p. 63.

¹⁰²⁴Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 376.

¹⁰²⁵Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 735.

¹⁰²⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 234, 235.

responsibility to God for what belonged to someone else (v. 9). It is further obvious in his responsibility to God respecting his special personal calling (37:5-9; 45:5-9). Additionally, we see it in his responsibility to God concerning his sacred vocation as a member of the house of Israel.

"It is too little observed, and especially by young men who have most need to observe it, that in such temptations it is not only the sensual that needs to be guarded against, but also two much deeper-lying tendencies—the craving for loving recognition, and the desire to respond to the feminine love for admiration and devotion . . . a large proportion of misery is due to a kind of uncontrolled and mistaken chivalry."¹⁰²⁷

Joseph's punishment was light in view of the charge against him. Joseph's integrity had obviously impressed his master, but Potiphar himself may have also had questions about his wife's chastity (cf. Ps. 105:18). Nevertheless it seems that he believed his wife's story (v. 19).¹⁰²⁸ 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 received from Potiphar. The Lord honored Joseph ("made him prosper" in "whatever he did") as one who had honored Him (1 Sam. 2:30). It is easier to depart from God's will when we are alone, and when there is not much hope for the immediate future.

"Yokes borne in youth have at least three results; they prove personal integrity, they promote spiritual maturity, and they prepare for fuller opportunity. In nature and in human life the best things are not the easiest but the hardest to obtain. . . .

"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."¹⁰²⁹

¹⁰²⁷Dods, p. 344.

¹⁰²⁸Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 2:4:5.

¹⁰²⁹Thomas, pp. 375-76. Cf. James 1.

This chapter reveals that dedication to God's calling enables His servants to resist temptation.¹⁰³⁰

5. The prisoners' dreams and Joseph's interpretations ch. 40

When Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker had disturbing dreams in prison, Joseph accurately foretold their meanings—the cupbearer's restoration and the baker's execution—but Joseph remained in prison because the cupbearer forgot him.

The "cupbearer" and the "baker" were responsible for Pharaoh's drink and food (vv. 1-4). Nehemiah, much later, occupied a similar position to this cupbearer in the Persian court (cf. Neh. 1:11—2:8). Perhaps *both* food-service employees 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 ("captain of the guard") authority. Potiphar gave Joseph the job of servicing (put him "in charge of") Pharaoh's two important prisoners.

"Genuine loyalty to God will always express itself in absolute faithfulness in every-day duty."¹⁰³¹

The Egyptians and the Babylonians regarded dreams as very significant predictions (vv. 5-8).¹⁰³²

"There were men who had learned the technique of interpreting dreams, and there was a considerable literature on the subject."¹⁰³³

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 ("Do not interpretations belong to God?" v. 8; cf. 41:16, 25, 28, 39). Daniel also had this ability, and likewise gave God the credit (cf. Dan. 2:28).¹⁰³⁴

The baker would not simply suffer execution; his corpse would then be impaled and publicly exposed. (Josephus called this "crucifixion," impaling being an early form of

¹⁰³⁰See Doug Mennen, "How the Wise Man Overcomes Temptation," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):90.

¹⁰³¹Thomas, p. 380.

¹⁰³²Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 218-19.

¹⁰³³von Rad, p. 371.

¹⁰³⁴For other remarkable parallels between Joseph and Daniel, see Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 637.

crucifixion.¹⁰³⁵) The Egyptians did this to prevent one's spirit from resting in the afterlife.¹⁰³⁶

The significance of this chapter lies in Joseph's God-given ability to interpret dreams. This gift, and Joseph's use of it on this occasion, prepared the way for Pharaoh's calling for Joseph, two years later, to interpret *his two dreams*—and exalting him to high office in the government (ch. 41).

"Trials may be viewed from two standpoints, and it will make all the difference to our spiritual life and peace which of these two points of view we take. From the human side Joseph's suffering was due to injustice on the part of Potiphar, and ingratitude on the part of the butler. From the Divine side these years were permitted for the purpose of 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."¹⁰³⁷

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 (honestly and accurately). This led to God elevating Joseph in the government, and demonstrating His sovereign control over economic life in Egypt, as He prepared to preserve Israel and Egypt through the coming famine.

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."¹⁰³⁸

"Divination" tries to understand the future, and "magic" seeks to control it. God prevented 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.

¹⁰³⁵Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 2:5:3 and 4. See *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Crucifixion," by D. H. Wheaton.

¹⁰³⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 384.

¹⁰³⁷Thomas, p. 389.

¹⁰³⁸Keil and Delitzsch, 1:349.

"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."¹⁰³⁹

Yet these symbols had multiple meanings to the Egyptians, which probably accounts for the difficulty of interpretation.¹⁰⁴⁰

"Seven-year famines were a familiar feature of life in the ancient Near East."¹⁰⁴¹

41:9-24 Joseph carefully gave God the glory for his interpretive gift in his response to Pharaoh ("It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer," v. 16).

"As far as Joseph was concerned, absolute truthfulness in guarding God's honor was far more important than personal advantages."¹⁰⁴²

"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."¹⁰⁴³

41:25-36 Joseph also presented God as sovereign over Pharaoh ("God has told [and 'has shown'] to Pharaoh what He is about to do," vv. 25, 28). The Egyptians regarded Pharaoh as a divine manifestation in human form. By accepting Joseph's interpretation of his dreams, Pharaoh chose to humble 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."¹⁰⁴⁴

¹⁰³⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁰Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 391.

¹⁰⁴¹Ibid., p. 398.

¹⁰⁴²Leupold, 2:1025-26.

¹⁰⁴³Bush, 2:277.

¹⁰⁴⁴Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 214.

"The intention of prophecies concerning judgments to come, is to excite those threatened with them to take proper measures for averting them."¹⁰⁴⁵

"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."¹⁰⁴⁶

"Joseph prefigured the victors Moses and Daniel, the bookends of Israel's period of captivity, whose wisdom prevailed over the Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor 1:18—2:16)."¹⁰⁴⁷

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 "divine 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, much less comprehended His "tri-unity." Most likely, he thought *some unfamiliar or unknown 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. However, this Pharaoh seems to have been unusually humble, generous, and secure.

"At any time the king would—and did—appoint outsiders. In fact, the noteworthy careers, as preserved for us in tomb inscriptions, broke through all departmental limitations. Men of humble origin could rise to the top once their gifts were recognized; and we find that they were called to a succession of posts which would seem to us to have required entirely different preparatory training."¹⁰⁴⁸

¹⁰⁴⁵Bush, 2:281. Cf. von Rad, p. 376.

¹⁰⁴⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 240.

¹⁰⁴⁷Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 740.

¹⁰⁴⁸Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p. 35. Cf. Kitchen, *The Bible . . .*, p. 74; J. K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, pp. 93-95; Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 395-96; and Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 533.

To naturalize Joseph, Pharaoh gave him an Egyptian name: "Zaphenath-paneah" (v. 45; cf. Dan. 1:7), which probably means "The God Speaks and Lives," and an Egyptian wife from an appropriate level of society. Her name, "Asenath," means "Belonging to (the goddess) Neith." Joseph's father-in-law, "Potiphara," meaning "He Whom *Ra* (the sun god) Gave," 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."¹⁰⁴⁹

Joseph's marriage to an Egyptian seems to have been Pharaoh's order, and God permitted it. The patriarchs generally avoided marrying Canaanites because of God's curse on Canaan (9:25), but marriage to non-Canaanite Gentiles was less serious. Joseph's wife and in-laws did not turn him away from his faith in Yahweh, or his high regard for God's promises to his forefathers (cf. Moses).

"Although Joseph married a pagan priest's daughter, he trained his sons to worship the living God. Probably Asenath also became a worshiper of the Lord."¹⁰⁵⁰

41:46-57

The notation of the birth of Joseph's sons is, of course, very significant—in view of God's purposes concerning Abraham's family (vv. 50-52). Joseph acknowledged God's *goodness* to him in the naming of both his sons: "God has made me forget all my trouble" and "God has made me fruitful." An allusion to the blessing aspect of the patriarchal promises occurs in verse 49: "abundance like the sand of the sea . . . beyond measure."

"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."¹⁰⁵¹

Some readers of Genesis have wondered why Joseph did not inform Jacob of his welfare quickly, since he must have realized that Jacob would have worried about his disappearance. In naming Manasseh, Joseph said 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.¹⁰⁵² This seems

¹⁰⁴⁹Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 288.

¹⁰⁵⁰*The Nelson . . .*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁵¹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 512.

¹⁰⁵²Marc Shapiro, "The Silence of Joseph," *Journal of Reform Judaism* 36:1 (Winter 1989):15-17.

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 would fulfill the rest of His promises contained in his dreams.¹⁰⁵³ He may have concluded that his best course of action would be to continue to let God take the initiative, since he had done so consistently in his life to that time. Joseph had evidently come to trust God in place of his father. In this sense, he had "forgotten" his "father's household" as well, not just his "troubles" there.

"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."¹⁰⁵⁴

One might say that, for Joseph, life in Canaan was a closed chapter of his life.¹⁰⁵⁵

"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."¹⁰⁵⁶

¹⁰⁵³Delitzsch, 2:306; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 535.

¹⁰⁵⁴von Rad, p. 379.

¹⁰⁵⁵Cf. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 766.

¹⁰⁵⁶Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 242. See also idem, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 215.

Note some comparisons between Joseph and Daniel. Like Joseph, Daniel was a Hebrew slave summoned before a Gentile king to interpret a dream. Like Joseph, Daniel interpreted the king's dreams that the other wise men in the king's court could not decipher. Like Joseph, Daniel enjoyed promotion from the status of slave to high government official, as a reward for rendering faithful service.

God controls the fortunes of nations to protect and provide for His covenant people.

7. Joseph's brothers' first journey into Egypt ch. 42

In this chapter, Joseph awakened his brothers' guilty consciences, for the things they had done to him and their father, when, after the brothers had come to Egypt for food, he put them into prison as spies. By keeping Simeon hostage while allowing the others to bring Benjamin back, Joseph pricked their consciences even more.

Joseph treated his brothers this way in order to discover how they felt toward Jacob, and especially his younger brother Benjamin, who had taken Joseph's place in Jacob'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 [15:13]. 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."¹⁰⁵⁷

42:1-7 Twenty-one years after his brothers sold Joseph into slavery, they "bowed down" before him, in fulfillment of his youthful dreams (vv. 6-7; cf. 37:5-9). Ronald Hyman analyzed Joseph's skillful use of questions to uncover his brothers' attitudes and intentions, as well as the key role that questions played in the whole Joseph narrative—there are 30 to 40 of them.¹⁰⁵⁸

"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

¹⁰⁵⁷Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 647.

¹⁰⁵⁸Ronald T. Hyman, "Questions in the Joseph Story: The Effects and Their Implications for Teaching," *Religious Education* (Summer 1984):437-55.

suppliants, almost craving as an alms those supplies of food for which they were both able and willing to pay the price demanded."¹⁰⁵⁹

"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)."¹⁰⁶⁰

People who sell their brother into slavery are not trustworthy. Therefore Joseph retained power over his brothers until he could trust them.

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)."¹⁰⁶¹

42:8-17 Joseph remembered his dreams (v. 9), and the proof of God's faithfulness undoubtedly encouraged his confidence as he proceeded to deal with his brothers. He played the role of a prosecutor before them, charging them with a crime ("you are spies") 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, remembering that they had contemplated, and even worse plotted, killing himself (v. 15).

¹⁰⁵⁹Bush, 2:298.

¹⁰⁶⁰Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 519. Cf. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 163.

¹⁰⁶¹Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 649.

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."¹⁰⁶²

42:18-24 Joseph's profession of faith in God (*Elohim*; "I fear God," v. 18) told his brothers that he realized he was under divine authority, and therefore he would be fair with them. His test guaranteed Benjamin's safe passage to Egypt, something that Joseph had every reason to worry about, in view of his brothers' treatment of himself. Earlier, when he saw only 10 brothers—and not Benjamin—he probably wondered if the 10 had already done away with Benjamin.

The brothers saw divine retribution in what had happened to them ("Truly we are guilty concerning our brother"; vv. 21-23). The brothers confessed their guilt in dealing with Joseph as they had done in his hearing, *not knowing*, "however, that Joseph understood." 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 ("he turned away from them"). Joseph's heart had not become hard toward his brothers because of their treatment of him. He did not hate them ("he returned to them and spoke to them"; v. 24).

"There is nothing more striking in the character of Joseph than the utter absence of revengeful feeling, whether it was against his brothers, or against Potiphar, or against the chief butler."¹⁰⁶³

Rather, Joseph's heart remained tender, and his brothers' confession moved him ("he . . . wept"). Reuben as the eldest and most responsible son would have been the logical choice to retain as a hostage. Yet because Joseph had overheard that Reuben had talked his brothers out of killing him ("Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy?'" v. 22), Joseph passed him over

¹⁰⁶²Kidner, p. 199. Cf. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 542.

¹⁰⁶³Thomas, p. 407.

and selected "Simeon," who was the next oldest. Perhaps Joseph also remembered Simeon's cruelty and callousness toward his father (34:25; cf. 49:5-7).

42:25-28 Joseph "restore[d]" his brothers' "money" to them out of the goodness of his heart. His gracious act would satisfy their needs on their return trip, but would also cause them to search their souls further as they contemplated the implications of their good fortune. When the brothers first discovered the money in one of their sacks, they regarded what God was doing to them as divine punishment ("their hearts sank . . . 'What is this that God has done to us?'" v. 28). This is the first time in the story that the brothers mentioned God. Their aroused consciences saw God at work behind what they were experiencing (cf. vv. 21-22).

"Silver, money' (*keseph*) is mentioned twenty times (42:25—45:22). In the first scene of Act 1 [37:2-36], the 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)."¹⁰⁶⁴

42:29-38 Each time Jacob's sons had left home, they returned with more money but minus a brother (chs. 37, 42).¹⁰⁶⁵ 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 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."¹⁰⁶⁶

The money in the sacks widened the breach between Jacob and his sons, but drew the brothers closer together. Jacob despaired, not only because he distrusted his sons and the Egyptian ruler, 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 together for good for Jacob (cf. 45:5-7; Rom. 8:28). He would soon realize God's blessing.

"A great portion of our present trouble arises from our not knowing the whole truth."¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶⁴Waltke, *Genesis*, pp. 541-42.

¹⁰⁶⁵Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 535.

¹⁰⁶⁶The NET Bible note on 42:34.

¹⁰⁶⁷Bush, 2:309.

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* turn over 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.¹⁰⁶⁸

"The motives and actions of Joseph and his family members are not patterns to be copied or avoided. The author's goal is to show that God's designs for Israel's fathers are working toward the end of redeeming the household of faith."¹⁰⁶⁹

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 this section echoes, it consists of seven scenes arranged palistrophically, with the central scene being the arrest of Joseph's brothers (44:1-13).

- A Jacob sends his sons to Egypt (43:1-14).
- B Arrival in Egypt; the steward and the brothers (43:15-25)
- 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).¹⁰⁷⁰

Upon returning to Canaan, the brothers had to persuade Jacob to let Benjamin accompany them on their next trip to Egypt, which they did, but 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.

¹⁰⁶⁸See Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 550, for further development of the "severe mercies" God used to heal Jacob's fractured family.

¹⁰⁶⁹Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 768.

¹⁰⁷⁰Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, pp. 418-19.

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 ("you may hold me responsible for him . . . If I do not bring him back to you . . . let me bear the blame before you forever"; v. 9). From this point on, Judah becomes the leader of Jacob's sons (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 (cf. Prov. 18:16).

"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) . . ." ¹⁰⁷¹

Compare also Rebekah's complaint when she thought she might lose both Jacob and Esau (27:45).

"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." ¹⁰⁷²

43:16-25 A better translation of, "I had your money," (v. 23) is, "Your money had come to me." In modern parlance: "Don't worry; the money was returned to me."

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." ¹⁰⁷³

¹⁰⁷¹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 545. See also S. B. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes, and Structure*, pp. 123-42, for linguistic and thematic parallels between the Esther story and the Joseph story.

¹⁰⁷²W. L. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷³Bush, 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.¹⁰⁷⁴ 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.¹⁰⁷⁵ The Egyptians also shaved off all their body hair (cf. 41:14), so the hairiness of the Hebrews may have been another reason for the Egyptians' distaste.¹⁰⁷⁶ This segregation later allowed the Israelites to develop into a numerous nation within the borders of Egypt (cf. 46:34).

Joseph now hosted a meal for his brothers, who, years before, had callously sat down to eat while he languished in a pit.¹⁰⁷⁷ Joseph gave the highest honor to Benjamin as his *distinguished guest*, by giving him larger and better servings of food than his brothers received ("five times as much"; v. 34). Special honorees frequently received double portions, but a *fivefold* portion was the sign of highest privilege. With this favor, Joseph sought not only to honor Benjamin, but also to test his other brothers' feelings toward Benjamin. He wanted to see if they would hate Benjamin as they had hated him, his father's *former* favorite. Evidently they passed this test.

"Coming forth from this crucible, the formerly callous brothers emerge a bonded family, shining with integrity and love toward one another. . ."¹⁰⁷⁸

"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."¹⁰⁷⁹

9. Joseph's last test and its results ch. 44

Joseph next tested his brothers' loyalty to Benjamin, by framing Benjamin and charging him with stealing Joseph's cup. These events prompted the brothers to acknowledge that God was punishing them for their treatment of Joseph many years earlier. Judah's plea for Benjamin voiced the genuineness of the brothers' loyalty to Benjamin. It contrasts with their former disloyalty to Joseph.

Joseph wanted to discover if his brothers would sell Benjamin as a slave, as they had sold *him*, and possibly kill Jacob with sorrow. Their only reasonable alternative was to submit

¹⁰⁷⁴Cf. Herodotus, *Histories*, 2:18, 41.

¹⁰⁷⁵See also the note on 46:34.

¹⁰⁷⁶*The Nelson . . .*, pp. 79, 84.

¹⁰⁷⁷Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 302.

¹⁰⁷⁸Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 557.

¹⁰⁷⁹Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 662.

to slavery for Benjamin's sake. This discovery seems to have been the object of Joseph's actions, as Moses related them in this chapter. As God had tested the genuineness of Abraham's faith (22:1), so Joseph tested the genuineness of his brothers' repentance.

44:1-5 That Joseph actually *practiced* "divination" (a black art of the dark demonic world, that was later outlawed by God) is not clear from either verse 5 or verse 15. He may have, but this seems inconsistent with his *character*, as a man of faith in Yahweh. 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.

Some interpreters, however, believe Joseph's *claim* was just part of his *ruse*.¹⁰⁸⁰ The first statement, made by Joseph's servant, may have been a *lie* (v. 5). The second statement, made by Joseph, did not *claim* to actually "practice divination" (v. 15). Joseph said that such a person as he could ("such a man as I *can*," i.e., I have the authority and resources to) do it. Leon Wood 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."¹⁰⁸¹ These references to divination seem intended to impress Joseph's brothers with the value of the cup that had disappeared. The Hebrew word translated "cup" here, *gabia'*, refers to an extremely valuable and special chalice or goblet, not to a common drinking cup, a *kos*. The brothers inferred, rightly or wrongly, that Joseph used it 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 rashly pronounced a *death sentence* (which would presumably have been carried out on Rachel, who was hiding the idols) on the guilty person (cf. 31:23, 25, 33, 35). Now the Egyptians searched for Joseph's cup of divination—and found it—in "Benjamin's sack"—*Rachel's son's!* The brothers here, like their father Jacob, also rashly pronounced a death sentence on the guilty person: "With whomever it is found . . . let him die!"

Joseph's steward did not hold the brothers to their promise to become the steward's slaves, 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!

¹⁰⁸⁰E.g., Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 559; and Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 799.

¹⁰⁸¹Wood, *The Prophets . . .*, pp. 32-33.

There's plenty of evidence in the text that Joseph's brothers had truly repented and changed their attitudes. They were no longer greedy, jealous, or disloyal. This put them in a position to enjoy the blessings of their "sovereign" (Joseph), and to become channels of blessing to others. Their "sovereign" (lord) was Joseph, on the human level, but Joseph was also God's representative (serving their Sovereign in heaven—God). Note how they acted together now, rather than fighting among themselves, as they had done previously.

Tearing one's clothing was a sign of great personal distress in the ancient Near East (v. 13; cf. 37:29). Here it expressed the brothers' sincere agony, first, at the prospect of having to turn Benjamin over to the Egyptians, and second, having to return to Jacob *only to break his heart!* They tore their clothes in anguish, as Jacob had done when he received news of Joseph's apparent death (37:34). The brothers did not suspect that they were the victims of fraud, any more than Jacob did when his sons gave him Joseph's bloody coat.¹⁰⁸²

"That all the brothers suffered such distress is a telling sign of the new sense of unity they had developed. They had already been informed that the innocent will be released (v. 10). Moreover, that they all return to Egypt underscores their commitment to Benjamin. The brothers are of one accord without any grumbling or dissent. . . . They were guilty [previously] but did not show remorse; now they are innocent and demonstrate deepest agony."¹⁰⁸³

44:14-17 Judah acted as the 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 ("God has found out the iniquity of your servants").¹⁰⁸⁴ Actually it was divine *discipline* that God designed in order to produce *repentance*. Judah did not try to get rid of the "privileged son" this time. Instead, he volunteered to share Benjamin's fate—at great personal sacrifice!

Joseph allowed Judah and the other brothers to depart and return home, but *without* Benjamin (v. 17). 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).

¹⁰⁸²Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 564.

¹⁰⁸³Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 800.

¹⁰⁸⁴See D. Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law*, pp. 248-55; and Sternberg, p. 306.

"No orator ever pronounced a more moving oration."¹⁰⁸⁵

"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."¹⁰⁸⁶

Jacob had not changed, in that he still doted on his youngest son. However, the brothers had changed; they now loved their father and Benjamin. Note Judah's appeal to Jacob's old age and Benjamin's youth (v. 20), descriptions designed to stress each one's vulnerability and so elicit Joseph's pity. 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, and the moral high point of his career, was his willingness to trade places with Benjamin and remain in Egypt as a slave ("let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord"; vv. 33-34; cf. John 15:13). This is the first instance of altruistic human substitution in Scripture (cf. 19:8; 22:13).

"A spiritual metamorphosis for the better has certainly taken place in Judah. . . . He who once callously engineered the selling of Joseph to strangers out of envy and anger is now willing to become Joseph's slave so that the rest of his brothers, and especially Benjamin [whom Jacob loved more than Judah], may be freed and allowed to return to Canaan to rejoin their father."¹⁰⁸⁷

Jesus Christ, Judah's descendant, demonstrated the same attitude.

"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."¹⁰⁸⁸

God teaches His people to be loyal to one another, by convicting them of previous disloyalty, in order to get them to love one another unselfishly. Such self-sacrificing love is essential for the leaders of God's people.

¹⁰⁸⁵Bush, 2:329.

¹⁰⁸⁶Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 7:368.

¹⁰⁸⁷Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 570.

¹⁰⁸⁸Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 567.

10. Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers 45:1-15

Joseph emotionally revealed his identity to his brothers, when he could no longer hold back his feelings. Joseph assured his brothers of God's sovereign control of his life, and then directed them to bring Jacob to Egypt. He then warmly demonstrated his love for his brothers: "You shall live in the land of Goshen . . . there I will also provide for you." 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 ("so loudly that the Egyptians heard . . . and the household of Pharaoh heard"; vv. 1-2; cf. 2 Sam. 13:9). Joseph then explained his perspective on his brothers' treatment of him; he had discerned and accepted God's providential control of the events of his life. Four times he stated that God, not his brothers, was behind what had happened ("God sent before you . . ." [twice]; "God . . . made me a father to Pharaoh"; "God made me lord of all Egypt"; 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."¹⁰⁸⁹

"It is divine sovereignty that undergirds the optimism of Genesis. 'God sent me to *preserve life*,' says Joseph."¹⁰⁹⁰

"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."¹⁰⁹¹

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."¹⁰⁹²

Joseph called God "Ha Elohim," the personal God, the God of their fathers (v. 8). Joseph was "a father to Pharaoh," in that he was his adviser, like a father might be an adviser to his son (v. 8).

¹⁰⁸⁹Ibid., p. 563.

¹⁰⁹⁰Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 433.

¹⁰⁹¹Thomas, pp. 379-80.

¹⁰⁹²Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 576.

"The theme of divine providential care is put into words by Joseph himself (45:7-8; 50:20), summing up the whole patriarchal story."¹⁰⁹³

An appreciation for God's sovereign control produced in Joseph a character marked by graciousness, forgiveness, and acceptance. No one can force us out of God's will. I have known people who became bitter because they lost a good job, or a close family member, or a prized possession. But these events are all part of God's sovereign plan to bring *blessing*. Even having suffered abuse in the past, as Joseph did, is no excuse for holding bitterness.

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 other brothers—to express his love to them and to confirm his forgiveness of them (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 because they hated him (37:4). But now, after a threefold expression of Joseph's goodwill toward his siblings (weeping, explaining, and embracing), the shocked and fearful brothers gained the courage to speak. They now recognized Joseph as the *same one* whom 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 loving hand of his God behind the cruelty of his brothers. He had accepted all that had come to him as the will of God, and therefore he experienced the blessing of God. Reconciliation is possible when there is forgiveness, and forgiveness is possible when there is recognition of God's sovereignty.

"Some have questioned the morality of Yosef's actions, seeing that the aged Yaakov might well have died while the test was progressing, without ever finding out that Yosef had survived. But that is not the point of the story. What it is trying to teach (among other things) is a lesson about crime and repentance. Only by recreating something of the original situation—the brothers are again in control of the life and death of a son of Rachel—can Yosef be sure that they have changed. Once the brothers pass the test, life and covenant can then continue."¹⁰⁹⁴

Though the Bible never identifies Joseph as a type of Christ, many analogies are apparent and 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.

¹⁰⁹³Whybray, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹⁴E. 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 so exceptionally generous because Pharaoh held Joseph in such 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 only 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 later could not leave Egypt, when they had settled there, was due to a *new* Pharaoh's new policies concerning the Israelites as residents of Egypt. It was not due to the action of this Pharaoh (Sesostris III).

" . . . when Pharaoh restates Joseph's offer and 'twice' gives the brothers the 'good' (vv. 18, 20) of the land of Egypt, it is hard not to see in the purpose of this narrative a conscious allusion to the 'good' (1:31) land given to Adam in Genesis 1. The picture of Joseph is a picture of restoration—not just the restoration of the good fortune of Jacob, but, as a picture, the restoration of the blessing that was promised through the seed of Jacob. This picture is also a blueprint for the hope that lies for the people of Israel at the end of the Pentateuch. They are to go into the land and enjoy it as God's good gift (e.g., Dt 30:5)."¹⁰⁹⁵

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.¹⁰⁹⁶

Jacob had suffered as a victim of his sons' deception and malice. But he had also suffered because of his own failure to cling to the promises that God had given: to his forefathers, to himself, and to Joseph in his dreams. Jacob always had difficulty believing without seeing. Nevertheless, when he *believed* that Joseph was alive and ruling over Egypt, his "spirit . . . revived," and he returned to a position of trust in God. For this reason, Moses called him "Israel" again in the text (v. 28). Often, in Genesis, a final comment by a chief actor in the drama anticipates the next scene, as here.

¹⁰⁹⁵Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 223.

¹⁰⁹⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 430.

"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."¹⁰⁹⁷

God's encouragement to move 46:1-7

The structure of chapters 46 and 47 is also chiasmic.¹⁰⁹⁸

- 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. Earlier, Abraham had planted a "tamarisk tree" there, and "called on the name of the LORD" (21:33). Isaac had built an altar there and called on the LORD, after God had appeared to him (26:24-25). It was perhaps at this very altar that Jacob now presented his sacrifices. Jacob must have had mixed feelings as he looked forward to seeing Joseph again. At the same time, he realized he was leaving the land promised to his family by God. This move was as momentous for Jacob, as Abram's journey had been from Ur (12:1-3), Jacob's flight to Paddan-aram (28:1-22), or his return to Canaan (31:3-54), all of which God encouraged with visions.

"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."¹⁰⁹⁹

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, in order to assure him that this move was in harmony with His will for him

¹⁰⁹⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 578.

¹⁰⁹⁸Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 439.

¹⁰⁹⁹Kidner, p. 208. Cf. Gen. 26:24; 28:13-15; 32:9.

and his family. This is one of four "Do not be afraid" consolations that God gave in Genesis (v. 3; cf. 15:1; 21:17; 26:24).

God promised to make Jacob's family "a great nation" in Egypt (cf. 12:2; 15:13-14; 17:6, 20; 18:18; 21:13-8). Because of the Egyptians' disdain for Hebrew shepherds, Jacob's family was not in danger of suffering amalgamation into Egyptian life—as they had been in danger of being absorbed into Canaanite life. They also received the best land in Egypt. The Israelites' removal to Egypt was a divine discipline, too. Jacob's sons had failed to stay separate from the Canaanites, so God, in keeping with His promise, temporarily removed them from the land He had promised them. Note the parallels with Esau's migration to Seir (cf. 36:2-8 and 46:8—47:27).

God promised to go with Jacob into Egypt ("I will go down with you . . ."; v. 4). Egypt became the womb that God used to form His nation.¹¹⁰⁰ Though Jacob was leaving God's *land*, he was not leaving *God* behind. God further promised to bring Jacob back into the land ("I will also surely bring you up again"). He did this by bringing Jacob's descendants back, 400 years later, and by bringing back Jacob himself (his body) 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.¹¹⁰¹



"Jacob's decidedly dysfunctional family is on the verge of coming together again in genuine community."¹¹⁰²

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. Simeon and Judah had married "Canaanite" women (vv. 10, 12; cf. 38:2). As in chapter 31, when Jacob left Paddan-aram, this move was also difficult for Jacob. Moses recorded a total of "70" persons (v. 27; cf. Exod. 1:5). The "66" referred to in verse 26 excluded Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh; or perhaps Er and Onan (v. 12) and Ephraim and Manasseh. Stephen said there were "75," but he must have added Joseph's

¹¹⁰⁰Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 574.

¹¹⁰¹Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 313.

¹¹⁰²Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 593.

three grandsons and two great-grandsons (Acts 7:14). These five were born later, as were some or all of Benjamin's 10 sons (v. 21), in all probability.

". . . 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]."1103

"It [verse 8] means: shortly after the children of Israel had come to Egypt there were to be found those seventy fathers from whom were derived the seventy clans that were the prevailing clans throughout Israel's early history."1104

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."1105

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 his 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)."1106

This opinion rests on the belief in a late date for the Exodus in the thirteenth century B.C., however, and may not be correct.

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).

1103Keil and Delitzsch, 1:371.

1104Leupold, 2:1115.

1105Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 225.

1106Kitchen, *The Bible . . .*, p. 76.

Joseph encouraged his family to be completely honest with Pharaoh ("Say to him, 'Your servants have been the keepers of livestock from our youth even until now,'" i.e., they were shepherds; v. 34). Dishonesty had 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, dependent on His continuing guidance and provision. "Providence" is God's guidance and care that He exercises through circumstances.

12. Joseph's wise leadership 46:31—47:27

As a result of Joseph presenting his family members to Pharaoh, they received the best of Egypt's land. Jacob blessed Pharaoh in return for his goodness. In the years that followed, Joseph bought almost all of Egypt for Pharaoh, saved the Egyptians' lives, and furthered Israel's prosperity and blessing. Through Joseph, 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 (47:15-25), as well as "fruitful" and "numerous" (47:27).

46:31-34 Egyptians loathed shepherds, because agriculture was the basis of Egyptian society, and the Nile River and its delta, where Goshen was, sustained it (v. 34). The Egyptian farmers organized their fields carefully, and controlled them relatively easily and neatly, but without large herds of livestock. The comparative difficulty, of controlling great herds of sheep, goats, and cows, led the Egyptians to think of those who cared for these animals as crude and barbaric.¹¹⁰⁷ Probably, too, the more "civilized" Egyptians distrusted any nomadic peoples.¹¹⁰⁸ This resulted in the Israelites living in separate territory from the Egyptians, where they increased in numbers, and developed a distinct national identity and vocation, as God had promised.

"Rameses III is said to have employed 3,264 men, mostly foreigners, to take care of his herds."¹¹⁰⁹

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

¹¹⁰⁷See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:374-75, and my note on 43:32.

¹¹⁰⁸Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 445.

¹¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 446.

is blessed by the greater" (Heb. 7:7). Jacob became a blessing to a Gentile world ruler, and so fulfilled God's promise of becoming a blessing, partially. This event also foreshadowed the future, complete fulfillment, of Israel's worldwide blessing of the nations.

"The least and most faltering of God's children has the superiority . . . in the presence of the most elevated men of the world."¹¹¹⁰

Jacob in this scene described his life as "my sojourning" (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, "few and unpleasant have been the years of my life," also suggests that neither Abraham nor Isaac had experienced the difficulties and distresses that Jacob had during his lifetime.

"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."¹¹¹¹

"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."¹¹¹²

The text describes 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. Rameses I reigned about 1347–1320 B.C.

¹¹¹⁰Darby, 1:78.

¹¹¹¹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18–50*, p. 612.

¹¹¹²Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 227.

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" and "Raameses") was in use when Jacob entered Egypt, even though extra-biblical references have not confirmed this.¹¹¹³ "Raamses" simply means "Ra [the sun god] has created it."¹¹¹⁴ Second, Rameses may have been the name of this district later, in Moses' day, when he wrote Genesis. Moses might 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.

Other later 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."¹¹¹⁵

God's provision of land and food for Pharaoh 47:13-27

This section demonstrates the fulfillment of Jacob's blessing on Pharaoh (46:31—47:6 and 47:7-10). Joseph was able to save Egypt and its neighbors from a very severe famine, and to alleviate the desperate plight of the Egyptians. Joseph fulfilled God's promises to bless his family through himself (promised through his dreams), and to bless the whole world through Abraham's descendants. Pharaoh received money from Egypt and Canaan (vv. 13-14), livestock (vv. 15-17), land and slaves (vv. 18-21, 23, 25), and 20 percent of future harvests (vv. 23-26). Such a tax was not out of line with what was common in that day in the ancient Near East. Twenty percent was actually a small tax at that time, since

¹¹¹³Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, pp. 70-71; and Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *A History of Israel*, pp. 74-75.

¹¹¹⁴*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 1939 ed., s.v. "Raamses," by C. R. Conder.

¹¹¹⁵Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 613.

the average was 33 and a third percent.¹¹¹⁶ God *blessed* this Pharaoh, because he had "blessed" the Israelites with the best of Egypt. Later, in Moses' time, God *cursed* a different Pharaoh, because *he* dealt harshly with the Israelites (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."¹¹¹⁷

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."¹¹¹⁸

"Both Egyptian and Mesopotamian slavery differentiated generally between formerly free people who became debt slaves and foreigners (usually war captives) who were bought and sold as chattel. Mesopotamian laws and contracts indicate that creditors obtained the service of the debt slave until the debt was covered, but chattel slaves belonged to their owners without much chance of release. Although we cannot know from Genesis, there is reason to believe that the voluntary submission of the people assumes that the enslavement was not permanent (cp. the law established by Joseph, 47:26)."¹¹¹⁹

"The idea of slavery is not attractive to the modern mind, but in the ancient world it was the primary way of dealing with the poor and destitute. If people became slaves of Pharaoh, it was Pharaoh's responsibility to feed them and care for them. It was the best way for them to survive the famine."¹¹²⁰

¹¹¹⁶Waltke, *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.

¹¹¹⁷Ross, *Creation and . . .*, p. 687. Cf. 12:3.

¹¹¹⁸Kidner, p. 211.

¹¹¹⁹Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 851.

¹¹²⁰The NET Bible note on 47:19.

This is the first mention of "horses" in the Bible, the primary beast of burden and military machine at that time (v. 17). Egypt was an important source of horses in Solomon's day (cf. 1 Kings 10:28-29).

47:20-26 Early Greek writers, as well as monument evidence, seem to confirm Joseph's political reforms and redistribution of land in Egypt.¹¹²¹ In a very real sense, Joseph became a "savior" of the Gentiles ("So they [the Egyptians] said to him [Joseph], 'You have saved our lives!'" ; v. 25) as well as the Jews.¹¹²² His 20 percent tax was generous compared to what is known elsewhere in the ancient Near East.¹¹²³

"We might also add that the exception made to temple lands (vv. 22, 26) shows that Joseph's action was not a crass land grab without regard for Egyptian tradition and society's welfare."¹¹²⁴

47:27 Under Joseph's administration Israel prospered (acquired property . . . were fruitful and became very numerous"), in contrast to Egypt, and increased in number without suffering deprivation or loss of independence. The fulfillment of God's promise to increase the seed of the patriarchs was quickly advancing—and 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 also showed he had learned that God will bless those He chooses to bless, by his blessing the younger Ephraim over the older Manasseh.

Jacob's request to be buried in Canaan 47:28-31

Jacob "lived" his last "17 years" in the care of Joseph, who, ironically, had spent the first 17 years of his life in Jacob's care (37:2). As Jacob's death seemed to be approaching, he called for Joseph and made him *swear* to bury him in the Promised Land ("with my fathers"), 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 in Egypt. In any event, his request demonstrated his preference for the promise of God rather than the acclaim of the world (cf. Moses, Heb. 11:24-25).

¹¹²¹Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, and Strabo. See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:379, and *Cambridge Ancient History*, 1:306–310.

¹¹²²See Frankfort, pp. 36-43.

¹¹²³Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 851, 860; Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 322; and 1 Maccabees 10:29.

¹¹²⁴Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 852.

Placing the hand under the "thigh" was a ritual connected with making a solemn promise (cf. 24:2-3). Jacob *worshipped God* for granting his wish. He evidently prostrated himself ("bowed") on his "bed," in *thanksgiving* to Yahweh, and or out of respect for Joseph (cf. 37:9-10). He may 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 willness to achieve his ends, now in the face of death shows that his ultimate hope is the promise of God."¹¹²⁵

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."¹¹²⁶

"It is appropriate that the end of Genesis should draw to a close with repeated references to the thematic word of the book (*b-r-k*, 'to bless')."¹¹²⁷

This very important section explains how "Ephraim" and "Manasseh" came to have *equal standing* with Joseph's brothers, and why Joseph did not become the head of a tribe. Manasseh would have been between 20 and 26 years old at this time (41:50; 47:28). Ephraim, of course, was younger than Manasseh. Thus we have another *etiology*.

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."¹¹²⁸

¹¹²⁵Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 452.

¹¹²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 461.

¹¹²⁷Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, p. 863.

¹¹²⁸Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 628.

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; it *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 (48:7) the land, so also Joseph gave Jacob 'two sons' (v. 5) just at the time when he was about to enter Egypt."¹¹²⁹

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."¹¹³⁰

Jacob gave God the credit that he was able to see Joseph's sons ("God has let me see your children as well," v. 11). He had come to acknowledge God's providential working and 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 very close to Jacob, between his knees, so that he could see and touch them (v. 12). Ancient Near Eastern adoption rituals included placing the adopted child on the knees of the adopting parent, to symbolize the *adopter* giving birth to the child in place of the birth mother.¹¹³¹ Now Joseph took his boys back to where he had been standing, a few feet away, in front of his father. He then "bowed" before Jacob.

"Joseph may be the second most powerful man in Egypt, but he never loses his respect for his father, and he never ceases to be gracious toward him."¹¹³²

¹¹²⁹Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 271.

¹¹³⁰Davis, p. 294.

¹¹³¹See I. Mendelsohn, "A Ugaritic Parallel to the Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh," *Israel Exploration Journal* (1959):180-83.

¹¹³²Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 635.

Arranging Manasseh and Ephraim in the normal order for Jacob's blessing, by their age with Manasseh to Jacob's right, Joseph then brought them forward again, within arm's reach of Jacob (v. 13).

This is the first of many scriptural instances of the laying on of hands (v. 14). 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 that Jesus Christ and the apostles performed. In this case, Jacob symbolically transferred a blessing from himself to Joseph's sons. Once uttered, blessings were irreversible (cf. Num. 23:20; Rom. 11:29).

Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh also carried prophetic significance and force (vv. 19-20). Under the inspiration of God, Jacob deliberately gave Ephraim the privileged "firstborn blessing," and predicted his *preeminence*. This was the fourth consecutive generation of Abraham's descendants in which the normal pattern of the firstborn assuming prominence over the second born was reversed: Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, and Ephraim over Manasseh. We can see this blessing in the process of its fulfillment, during the Judges Period, when the tribe of Ephraim had grown very large and influential. The combined tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh increased from 72,700, in the second year after the Exodus (Num. 1:32-35), to 85,200, forty years later (Num. 26:28-37). By contrast, the tribes of Reuben and Simeon decreased from 105,800 to 65,930 during the same period.

The Ephraimites took the lead among the ten northern tribes, and flourished: to the extent that the Jews used the names "Ephraim" and "Israel" interchangeably. The Ephraimites even occasionally demonstrated an attitude of superiority among the tribes, that we can trace back to this blessing (e.g., Judg. 12:1; et al.).

The Hebrew phrase translated "a multitude (group) of nations" (v. 19) appears only here in the Old Testament, and probably means "a company of peoples," namely, "numerous." The reference to "Israel" in verse 20 applies to the *nation* in the future—from Jacob's viewpoint.

Jacob's announcement of Joseph's birthright 48:21-22

Jacob ("Israel," the Prince with God) 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 tribal territory. The Israelites later distributed the land among the tribes (Josh. 24:1), and 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 ("with my sword and my bow"; v. 22). Probably Jacob viewed Simeon's and Levi's slaughter of the

Shechemites as his own taking of the city (34:27-29).¹¹³³ Another view is that Moses used the perfect tense in Hebrew, translated past tense in English ("took"), prophetically. In this usage, which is common in the Old Testament, the writer spoke of the future as past. The idea was that, since God predicted them by divine inspiration, events yet future are so certain of fulfillment that one could speak of them as already past. Here the thought is that Israel (Jacob) would take Canaan from the Amorites, the most powerful of the Canaanite tribes, not personally, but *through his posterity* (cf. 15:16).¹¹³⁴ Other scholars have suggested still another explanation:

"It is not impossible that the property which Jacob owned at Shechem was taken away by the Amorites after he left the region (cf. 35:4, 5) and that he eventually returned and repossessed it by force of arms?"¹¹³⁵

Apparently Jacob gave Joseph the town of "Shechem," which he regarded as a "down payment" of *all* that God would give *his descendants* as they battled the Canaanites in the future.

"For Joseph it was an honour that his father entrusted him with his funeral in Palestine (47.30f.). In 48.21f., the implication in family law is finally drawn: Joseph, instead of Reuben, receives the double heritage as a sign of his primogeniture (48.22a). Just as the son is commanded to bury the father in Palestine, so it is in Palestine that the priority of Joseph within the family takes effect. These two scenes thus enclose a detailed blessing for Joseph and his sons, so filling out the promise of his superiority in Palestine (48.22a)."¹¹³⁶

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.¹¹³⁷

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 also 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.

¹¹³³Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 601.

¹¹³⁴Keil and Delitzsch, 1:385.

¹¹³⁵Davis, p. 294. Cf. H. Vos, p. 165; Aalders, 2:267; Leupold, 2:1158; Bush, 2:384; and Thomas, p. 464.

¹¹³⁶Horst Seebass, "The Joseph Story, Genesis 48 and the Canonical Process," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (June 1986):30.

¹¹³⁷See William J. McIlwain Jr., "My Ways Are Not Your Ways," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):92-100.

"These chapters [Gen. 11—49], then, take the story from the first mention of Abram in 11:26 to the first mention of Israel as a people, a people blessed by God with a special blessing."¹¹³⁸

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."¹¹³⁹

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."¹¹⁴⁰

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, as is usually true.

"The Spirit of God revealed to the dying patriarch Israel the future history of his seed, so that he discovered in the character of his sons the future development of the tribes proceeding from them, and with prophetic clearness assigned to each of them its position and importance in the nation into which they were to expand in the promised inheritance."¹¹⁴¹

"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."¹¹⁴²

Jacob assumed, in his blessing, that his family would increase and possess the land of Canaan. This optimism reveals his faith.

¹¹³⁸Whybray, p. 4.

¹¹³⁹Joel 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.

¹¹⁴⁰R. E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence*, p. 23.

¹¹⁴¹Keil and Delitzsch, 1:387.

¹¹⁴²Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 331.

"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."¹¹⁴³

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, either, 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.

"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."¹¹⁴⁴

49:1-4 **Reuben.** As the firstborn, 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 ("you shall not have preeminence"; 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 firstborn of the favored Rachel, whereas Reuben was Leah's firstborn. Joseph's priority was not due solely to Jacob's preference, however, but to the will of God as revealed in Joseph's dreams.

"About no other tribe do we know so little as about *Reuben*. . . . The tribe produced no significant man, no judge, no king, no prophet."¹¹⁴⁵

No priest came from Reuben, either. *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.

¹¹⁴³Ross, "Genesis," p. 98.

¹¹⁴⁴Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 274, 275.

¹¹⁴⁵von Rad, p. 423.

"From this first oracle the teaching is clear that the behavior of one individual affects the destiny of his descendants."¹¹⁴⁶

49:5-7 **Simeon and Levi.** These two were brothers not only by blood but also in disposition. They were *violent*, "cruel," "wrath[ful]," and 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 smallest tribe (Num. 26). 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, and lived among the other tribes, especially in Judah's territory (cf. 1 Chron. 4:27, 38-43).

The Levites likewise 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, on the other hand, received 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). This resulted in their becoming a "tribe of priests" in Israel.

Even though these first three tribes suffered punishment for their sins, Jacob's prophecies about them were still a *blessing*. They retained a place in the chosen family, and 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."¹¹⁴⁷

49:8-12 **Judah.** Judah possessed a *lion-like* nature. As such, he became the leader of the other tribes (43:3-10; Judg. 1:1-2; 3:9; 20:18; etc.). Through him came David, and then came the Messiah: "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5). Judah led the other tribes, both in the march through the wilderness (Num. 2:1-3) and in the monarchy.

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.

¹¹⁴⁶Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 647.

¹¹⁴⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 603.

"Shiloh" (lit. "Bearer of Rest") is a proper name. The name 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).¹¹⁴⁸ Another live translation option is "until tribute comes to him" (NRSV).¹¹⁴⁹

"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."¹¹⁵⁰

Because Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had disqualified themselves, Judah received the leadership of the tribes and the blessing that normally went to the firstborn. This was how the leadership of the tribes and the messianic line fell to Judah. Jacob evidently forgave Judah's earlier sins, because he repented, and later sacrificed himself for Jacob's well-being.

Everything after the word "until" (v. 10) 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."¹¹⁵¹

"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."¹¹⁵²

¹¹⁴⁸See Eugene H. Merrill, "Rashi, Nicholas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1975):74-75.

¹¹⁴⁹Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 478. See Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, pp. 892-97, for an extended discussion of the interpretive possibilities.

¹¹⁵⁰Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 478.

¹¹⁵¹von Rad, p. 425.

¹¹⁵²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 277.

This prophecy is the first of many that follow, in the Old Testament, that associate bumper crops with the golden age of future blessing.

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."¹¹⁵³

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 Mediterranean Sea in the Millennium, when its borders will reach as far as Sidon on the Mediterranean coast ("he shall be a haven for ships"; cf. Ezek. 48:1-8, 23-27). An important caravan route from Mesopotamia to Egypt passed through this territory.

Issachar (vv. 14-15) would prefer an agricultural way of life, and what it produced, rather than political supremacy among the tribes. Lower Galilee, including the Valley of Jezreel, which Issachar obtained, was a pleasant and productive farming area.¹¹⁵⁴

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; cf. 3:1). Jacob asked Yahweh to deliver his other descendants from Dan's influence in the future ("For Your salvation I wait, O LORD," v. 18).

"Jacob's heartfelt aside in 18 is enigmatic: it could arise from a father's prayer, like Abraham's for Ishmael (17:18), or possibly from the sudden memory of his own treachery, long renounced, called up by the acts and the words (heel[s], 17, 19) associated with his own name."¹¹⁵⁵

¹¹⁵³Ibid.

¹¹⁵⁴See Joel D. Heck, "Issachar: Slave or Freeman? [Gen. 49:14-15]," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29:4 (December 1986):385-96.

¹¹⁵⁵Kidner, p. 220.

Gad (v. 19) would, like Dan, also be effective in battle ("he will raid at their heels").

Asher (v. 20) would enjoy very fruitful soil, namely, the lowlands of the Carmel (lit. "vineyard") range, north along the Mediterranean coast. This area contained some of the most fertile land in Canaan.

Naphtali (v. 21) evidently would enjoy the admiration and appreciation of the other tribes in a special way (cf. Deborah and Barak's victory; "Deborah's Song"; Judg. 4 and 5). Jacob could have meant, on the other hand, that Naphtali would exchange his freedom for a more sedentary domesticated lifestyle in the land ("a doe let loose"), or that he would accommodate ("gives beautiful words," i.e., speak flattery) to the Canaanites.¹¹⁵⁶

49:22-26 **Joseph's** blessing was especially abundant. The two tribes that bore his sons' names, Ephraim and Manasseh, would see the fulfillment of this blessing, even though, during his lifetime, Joseph had faced much opposition ("The archers bitterly attacked him, and shot and harassed him"). 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.), "the God of your father," and "the Almighty."¹¹⁵⁷

"Blessing is one of the key words of Genesis . . . occurring some eighty-eight times in the book. Here in two verses [25 and 26], like the finale of a fireworks display, the root occurs six times (verb 1x, noun 5x) making a brilliant climax to the last words of Jacob. The God-given blessings of the future will far outshine those already experienced."¹¹⁵⁸

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 ("Benjamin is a ravenous wolf . . . he devours the prey . . . he divides the spoil"; 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: "All these are the *twelve tribes* of Israel, and this is what *their* father said to

¹¹⁵⁶Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 483.

¹¹⁵⁷See the note in *The Nelson . . .*, pp. 93-94.

¹¹⁵⁸Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, p. 486.

them when he blessed *them*" (emphasis added).¹¹⁵⁹ This is only the second mention of the "12 tribes" in the Bible, the previous reference being in verse 16, where we read "the tribes of Israel."

"Within Jacob's words to each of the sons (after Judah), the theme of blessing has been evident in two primary images. First, the reverse side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of the victorious warrior. The defeat of the enemy is the prelude to the messianic peace. Second, the positive side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of great prosperity and abundance. Behind such imagery of peace and prosperity lies the picture of the Garden of Eden—the Paradise lost. The focus of Jacob's words has been the promise that when the one comes to whom the kingship truly belongs, there will once again be the peace and prosperity that God intended all to have in the Garden of Eden."¹¹⁶⁰

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. . . .

"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."¹¹⁶¹

¹¹⁵⁹See Darby, 1:80-82, for further observations concerning the fulfillment of these prophecies.

¹¹⁶⁰Sailhamer, "Genesis," pp. 278-79.

¹¹⁶¹Idem, *The Pentateuch* . . . , pp. 36-37.

A believer's works during this life, in the context of lasting spiritual fruit for the Lord, significantly determine the extent of divine blessing that he or she and their descendants will receive in the future.

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 "[C]ave (of the field) 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."¹¹⁶²

Jacob died peacefully, and was "gathered to his people" (i.e., reunited with his ancestors, implying life after death, in *Sheol*, the "Place of Departed Spirits"; cf. 25:8). Jacob was 147 when he died (47:28). Joseph evidently had Jacob's body preserved as a mummy ("Joshua commanded . . . the physicians to embalm his father," 50:2).¹¹⁶³

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).¹¹⁶⁴ It is the grandest state funeral recorded in the Bible, entirely appropriate since Jacob's story spans more than half of Genesis. The Egyptians mourned for Jacob "seventy days," just two days less than they normally mourned the death of a Pharaoh.¹¹⁶⁵ "Abel-mizraim" (v. 11) means "Mourning of Egypt."

"The Canaanites were so impressed with the party of mourners that they named the place for them."¹¹⁶⁶

"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."¹¹⁶⁷

¹¹⁶²Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 617.

¹¹⁶³See Davis, *Paradise to . . .*, pp. 302-3, or H. Vos, p. 169, for how the Egyptians prepared mummies.

¹¹⁶⁴See E. W. Hengstenberg, *Egypt and the Books of Moses*, pp. 70-71.

¹¹⁶⁵Ross, "Genesis," p. 100.

¹¹⁶⁶*The Nelson . . .*, p. 95.

¹¹⁶⁷Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 618.

The record of Jacob's burial in the land is important to the purposes of Genesis. God had promised the land to Abraham, and had already given the patriarchs *small portions* of it. The faith of these men that God would fulfill His promises, and do for their descendants all that He had promised—is obvious—in that they viewed Canaan as their homeland. They were counting on the future faithfulness of God, who had proved Himself faithful to them *personally* during their lifetimes.

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, despite the fact that Moses did not record it in Genesis. However, *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 because of Joseph's behavior (cf. v. 19).

Joseph's response to his fearful brothers reveals his attitudes toward God and them (vv. 18-21; cf. 27:41). He humbled himself under God's authority. Joseph regarded God as *sovereign* over him, and the One who had providentially guided all the events of his life. He knew that God's purposes for him, his family, and all people were good (cf. chs. 1—2). Consequently he behaved with tender compassion toward his brothers. Joseph proved to be his "brothers' keeper" (cf. 4:9). Genesis opened with a couple, Adam and Eve, *trying* to become "like God." It closes with a man, Joseph, *denying* that he is "in God's place."¹¹⁶⁸ Judas was to Jesus what Joseph's brothers were to Joseph.¹¹⁶⁹

"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."¹¹⁷⁰

"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.'"¹¹⁷¹

"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

¹¹⁶⁸E. I. Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis*, p. 156.

¹¹⁶⁹Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 707.

¹¹⁷⁰Richard Elliott Friedman, "Deception for Deception," *Bible Review* 2:1 (Spring 1986):30.

¹¹⁷¹Kidner, 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)."¹¹⁷²

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.¹¹⁷³ Some Egyptian texts refer to 110 as the ideal lifespan.¹¹⁷⁴ Abraham had lived to be 175, Isaac 180, and Jacob 147.

Joseph probably could have been given a burial in a pyramid, or had some other grand burial in Egypt. Like Moses, Joseph chose the promises of God over the privileges of the world. He is a model for all believers, Israelites in the past and present Christians alike. However, he wanted his family to embalm him and place his body in a coffin in Egypt. Later descendants would bury him ("his bones") in the Promised Land near Shechem. They would do so in the parcel of land his father Jacob had bought and given to him, perhaps 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: "God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." Verse 24 contains the first reference to the three patriarchs together.

"The outstanding feature of Joseph's life was faithful loyalty to God under all circumstances."¹¹⁷⁵

"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."¹¹⁷⁶

"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.*"¹¹⁷⁷

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.

¹¹⁷²Sailhamer, "Genesis," p. 283.

¹¹⁷³See Hugh C. White, "The Joseph Story: A Narrative that 'Consumes' Its Content," *Semeia* 31 (1985):49-69.

¹¹⁷⁴Hamilton, *The Book . . . Chapters 18—50*, p. 709.

¹¹⁷⁵Thomas, p. 379.

¹¹⁷⁶Jordan, pp. 67-68.

¹¹⁷⁷Kidner, p. 224.

Conclusion

Out of 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 (and 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.

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 obscured but did not obliterate this image. It also damaged but did not destroy man's relationship with God.

The key revelation in Genesis concerning the relationship that God and people have, is that God initiated it, and they can enjoy it when they respond in trust and obedience. People can and must have faith in God, in order to enjoy the relationship with God that He created them to experience. As men and women trust God, they experience God's blessing, and become instruments through whom God works to bring blessing to others.

How can we motivate others to trust and obey God as we minister to them? We can do so the same way Moses did through his *emphases* in Genesis: He demonstrated and illustrated God's *strength* (or *power*) and *trustworthiness*. God is powerful enough to do anything (especially chs. 1—11), and He is faithful to fulfill His promises (especially chs. 12—50). We need to point these things out in Scripture, in history, and in our own lives. This is what builds strong faith. To trust and obey *someone*, we must believe that the *person* is strong enough to do what is needed, and faithful to *his* or *her* (or *His*) word. We must also believe that they have our best interests at heart, which Genesis also demonstrates throughout.

Appendix 1

FIVE VIEWS OF CREATION¹¹⁷⁸

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.

¹¹⁷⁸This 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 non-literally when it conflicts with evolution.

Evaluation of the view

1. It cannot do justice to both the tenets of evolution and the teaching of Scripture.
2. It is ultimately destructive of biblical religion.

Modern advocates of the view

Some scientists and theologians, who have respect for but a weaker view of Scripture, hold this view; for example, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (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 geologic ages.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It provides a reasonable harmony between the Genesis record and the facts of science.

2. The translation of "day" as "age" is an exegetically legitimate one.
3. It is a tentative conclusion, and acknowledges that not all the scientific evidence is in, and that our understanding of the text may change as biblical scholarship progresses.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. There are discrepancies between the fossil record—and the order in which Genesis records that God created—of plants, fish, and animals. Answer: Science may be wrong at this point, or Genesis may have omitted the earliest forms of life.
2. Taking the six days of creation as "ages" is unusual exegetically. Answer: This interpretation is possible and best here.
3. "Evenings" and "mornings" suggest 24-hour periods. Answer: The sun did not appear until the fourth day.
4. Death entered the world before the Fall. Answer: It took on its horror at the Fall but existed before that event.

Evaluation of the view

This view takes the biblical text quite seriously, but adopts some unusual interpretations of that text in order to harmonize it with scientific data.

Modern advocates of the view

Many evangelicals who have been strongly influenced by science hold this view, including Davis A. Young, *Creation and the Flood* (1977). James Boice, Bernard Ramm, Robert Newman, Herman Eckelmann, and Hugh Ross also held this view.

Six-Day Creationism

Statement of the view

Genesis 1 describes one creative process that took place in six consecutive 24-hour periods of time, not more than 6,000 to 15,000 years ago.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It regards biblical teaching as determinative.
2. It rests on a strong exegetical base.
3. It results from the most literal (normal) meaning of the text.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. Data from various scientific disciplines (i.e., astronomy, radioactive dating, carbon deposits, etc.) indicate that the earth is about 5 billion years old, and the universe is about 15-20 billion years old. Answer: God created the cosmos (universe) with the "*appearance* of age."

"The Carbon 14 dating method has been developed by Willard F. Libby and J. R. Arnold at the Institute for Nuclear Studies of the University of Chicago. It depends upon the fact that in their exchange with the atmosphere, in the life process, all living things take in Carbon 14, which is an unstable or radioactive form of carbon with an atomic weight of 14. Upon the death of a living thing, this radiocarbon begins a long process of decay at a known rate. An ounce of it, for example, is reduced by disintegration to a half ounce in 5,500 years, this half is diminished to a quarter ounce in the next 5,500 years, and so on. Having determined experimentally the proportion of Carbon 14 in living matter, and knowing its 'half-life' as just indicated, it is possible to ascertain the age of an ancient organic sample by the amount of Carbon 14 (measured by a radiation counter) it contains. With present techniques, the effective range of the method is about 20,000 years, with a year error in dating samples of 5 to 10 per cent."¹¹⁷⁹

2. A universal flood cannot fully explain the geologic strata. Answer: It can explain *most* if not all of it, and the remainder may have been a result of creation.
3. Creation with the "appearance of age" casts doubt on the credibility of God. Answer: Since God evidently created Adam, plants, and animals with the appearance of age, He may have created other things with the appearance of age, too.
4. There is no reason why God would have created things with the appearance of age. Answer: He did so for His own glory, though we may not yet fully understand why.

Evaluation of the view

This view rests on the best exegesis of the text, though it contradicts the conclusions of several branches of science.

Modern advocates of the view

Many conservative evangelicals hold this view, for example, Robert E. Kofahl and Kelly L. Seagraves, *The Creation Explanation* (1975).

The Gap Theory

Statement of the view

Between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, there was a long, indeterminate period, in which we can locate the *destruction* of an "original world," and the unfolding of the geological ages.

¹¹⁷⁹Finegan, p. 13, n. 4. For 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.

Positive aspects of the view from the perspective of those who hold it

1. It rests on an exegetical, biblical base.
2. It is consistent with the structure of the creation account itself.
3. It is possible to translate the Hebrew verb translated "to be" in verse 2 as "become."
4. "Formless and void" in verse 2 may be a clue to God's *pre-Adamic judgment* on the earth.
5. It provides a setting for the fall of Satan.

Problems with the view and answers by its advocates

1. It is an unnatural explanation, since the text implies only an original creation in Genesis 1:2 and following (cf. Exod. 20:11). Answer: This 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

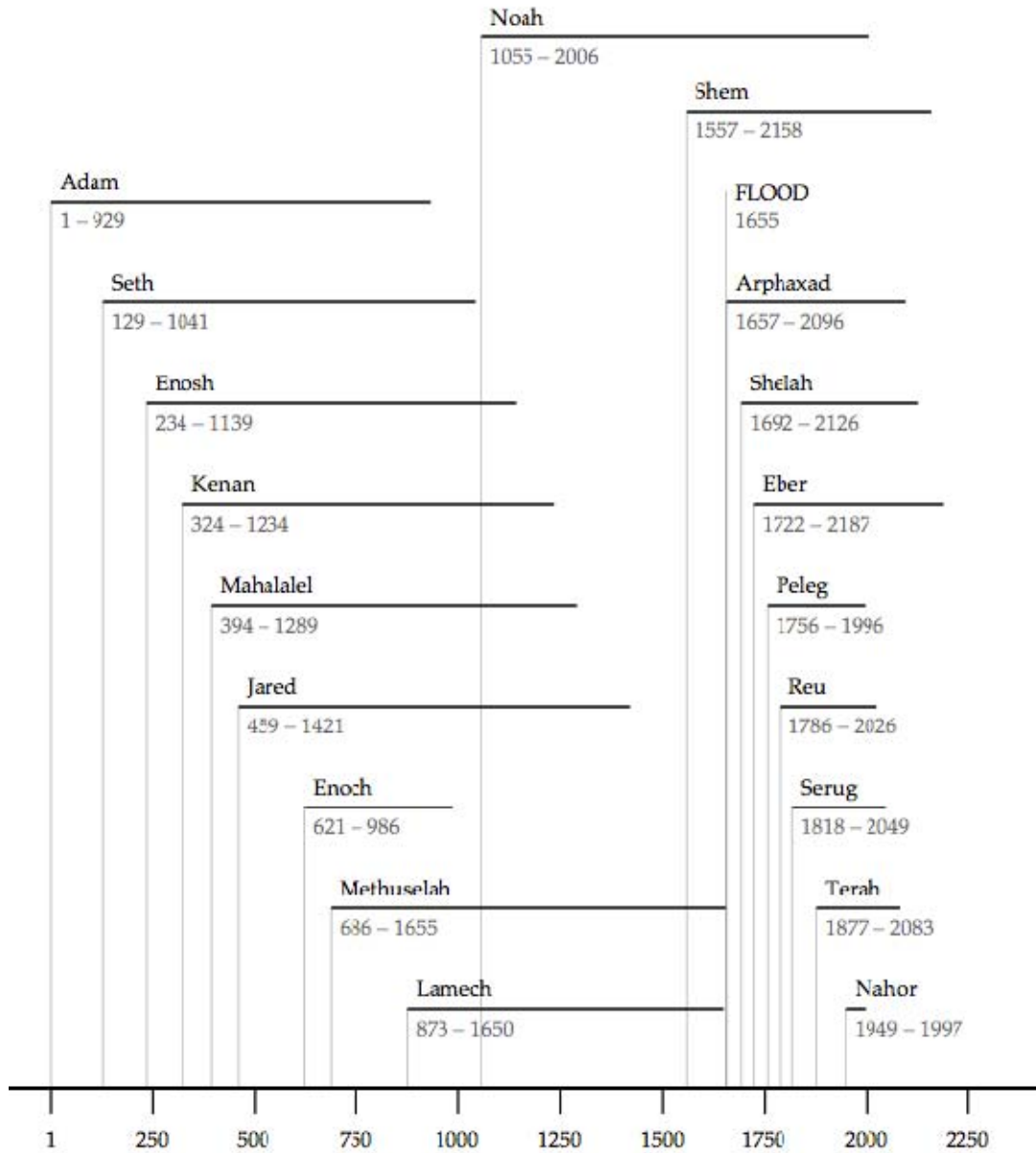
While this view grows out of a high view of Scripture, several of the interpretations required for it rely on improbable exegesis.

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).

Appendix 2

CHRONOLOGY OF GENESIS 5 AND 11



Appendix 3

COMPARISON OF FLOOD STORIES ¹¹⁸⁰					
	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) ¹¹⁸¹	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.
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.	

¹¹⁸⁰From 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.

¹¹⁸¹Albright, *Archaeology and . . .*, p. 19, dated the original to about 2000 B.C.

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."

Appendix 4

JERUSALEM'S TEMPLE MOUNT¹¹⁸²

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.

¹¹⁸²Reprinted 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.

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