

# **Getting Into The Promised Land Without Falling Asleep In Leviticus**

## **1. In The Beginning Genesis**

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**A Teaching Commentary  
of the Old Testament**

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# 1 In the Beginning

## Genesis

### 1.1 Introduction

The book of Genesis is the first of the books of the Pentateuch (the books attributed to Moses) and since the Pentateuch constitutes the first part of the Bible, the first book of the Bible. It deals with first things. It contains the story of the creation of the universe, climaxing with the creation of man. It tells of the time that man walked in perfect harmony with God. It tells of man's tragic rebellion and rejection of God and his subsequent separation from God – the very one who gives him and sustains his life. It tells of the global flood, of the time that God had to separate man by giving him different languages and nationalities. It tells of the call of one special individual through whose lineage God would reconcile the world unto himself – Abram, later called Abraham. It recounts Abraham's journey of faith and the passing on of his call and promise to his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. Genesis ends with the story of Jacob, later called Israel, and his life with his twelve sons (who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel). To escape famine in their own Promised Land, they journeyed to Egypt where there was food. They initially met with a great deal of favor there. That is how the book closes.

The word "Genesis" means "Beginning". In the book, we have the beginning of the world, the beginning of man, the beginning of sin, and the beginning of God's plan to reconcile the world to himself. Understanding of the book of Genesis is the beginning of understanding the nature of God, who he is, why he operates the way he does, and how we are to relate to him.

As stated earlier, the authorship of Genesis is attributed to Moses. Obviously Moses was not there when the world was created or when the flood occurred or when Abraham found out that he would become a father. These histories were passed along from parent to child orally for hundreds of years. Moses, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is accredited with having gathered them together into a coherent text and creating this book of history.

One of the greatest issues that divides students of the Bible is whether or not the first eleven chapters of the Bible (pre-Abraham) are to be taken as literal history. Many scholars feel that these are tales that were written to explain the nature of God as man in Moses' time understood it and to give some explanation about how we got here and ended up in the shape we did. Other scholars tend to take the stories as literal history. Those who do not take these literally are correct in observing that a great deal of time elapsed between the time of the events in these chapters and the time when the chapters were actually written. There would have been ample opportunities for creation or flood legends to creep into the oral traditions passed from father to son. In fact, if one examines the legends of other (non-Jewish) cultures of the ancient Near East, one will find that they, too, have creation stories that could be construed to bear some similarities with the creation story in the Bible. Many cultures have flood stories as part of their tradition – not identical to the story of Noah but flood stories just the same. Some hypothesize that Moses simply wrote down the Jewish versions of these same stories to create a believable introduction to the history he was about to write – the history he knew for sure (the bulk of the rest of the Pentateuch details the events of his own life). In offering this hypothesis, these overlook the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed..."). It seems to me that if so many cultures of the ancient Near East have legends similar to the stories of the Bible, then certain events must have actually taken place to inspire these common stories. There really was a creation. There really was a global flood, etc. Since

the stories vary in details, at most one of them could be completely accurate. My money goes on the one inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is my belief that Genesis is an accurate history and that the other somewhat similar legends are just that – embellished retellings of the real thing.

Why is this important? The Bible is a collection of sixty-six different books written by many different (human) authors over hundreds and hundreds of years of time. At the same time, the Bible is an intricately woven tapestry. It paints a coherent and consistent picture of the nature of God and his relationship with his creation. If you grab a thread of that tapestry in Genesis and pull on it, you will find that Revelation begins to unravel.

What would be the effects on mathematics and science and just about every other area of life if one day we discovered that basic arithmetic laws were not consistently true? Sometimes one plus one equals two but other times you just cannot count on it. The effects would be less shattering and less important than realizing that the Bible is not consistently true.

Still the historicity of these sections has long come under attack. The question of evolution has been one of the more serious attacks, at least in modern times. The theory of evolution is just that – a theory. Scientific fact is based upon observable phenomenon. In spite of every fossil in the world, no scientist has ever observed one species evolving into another. But even backing up from that, if evolution could be proven to be scientific fact, how would that change the truth of Genesis? Not at all. Genesis says that God created the universe and everything in it. It does not say how. Although I do not hold the theory of evolution to be true, I do believe that God could have populated the earth through evolution if he had chosen to do it that way. He could have caused one species to evolve to the next if he had wanted to do so because he can do anything he wants to do.

The point that I am trying to make is that centuries of learning may have refined our understanding of Biblical truths, but nothing has ever negated them. Nothing has ever been discovered that has discounted Biblical witness, even the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Furthermore, the Bible does not beg us to “swallow it whole” without checking it out first. Something this important deserves our scrutiny. God wants us to believe it. We cannot do that if we do not understand it. We cannot understand it if we do not ask questions.

Let us begin that process.

## **1.2 The First Creation Story – The Seven Days**

Genesis 1:1-2:3

The Bible begins with an explosion of the words, "In the beginning God." These four words give us the first bit of information that we have about God and perhaps some of the most important information about him. Our concept of time has a beginning. There was a point when the universe began. There was a specific time when our planet was created. There was a time when land first appeared and when plants first began to grow. There was a moment when man first put a foot on the ground. We began. And when we began, God was already there. "In the beginning God" separates us from our creator because we have a beginning and he does not.

In the book of Exodus, God met Moses at a burning bush. Moses asked him what his name was. God replied with a Hebrew name which transliterates into English roughly as YHWH (Hebrew was originally written without vowels) or Yahweh.<sup>1</sup> YHWH is a verb in Hebrew. It is a form of

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<sup>1</sup> YHWH can also be pronounced “Jehovah.” In Hebrew, the “yod” can be transliterated either as a “Y” or a “J.” The “waw” can be transliterated either as a “W” or a “V.” (This is a product of

the "to be" verb. Hebrew verbs do not really have tenses, but they do have a way of indicating whether or not the verb expresses a complete or an incomplete action. It is referred to as the Perfect or the Imperfect mood of the verb. A Perfect verb represents something that takes place and then completes. An Imperfect verb represents something that is going on continually. YHWH is the Imperfect form of the "to be" verb in Hebrew. It represents a state of being that has no real beginning or end. Unfortunately when we translate this into English, it comes out "I AM." It has a much richer connotation in Hebrew. When Moses asked God what his name was, God said, "I AM without any concept of beginning or end." "In the beginning God." Get it?

So what did God do in the beginning? In the beginning God created. Specifically he created the heavens and the earth. We are not here as a result of some cosmic accident. The earth did not randomly evolve from some lint ball that was bouncing around in a dryer in the sky. Creation is here because of a willful act of a creator. This reveals another marvelous aspect of God's character. He wanted us. He knew how badly we were going to mess up things but he still wanted us. We satisfy a desire in him. We are important to him.

The creation narrative tells of a time when the earth was formless, when there was darkness and a void, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. We see the Spirit of God at creation. The first chapter of John teaches us "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. ... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:1,14)" John is teaching about the work of Christ in creation. Thus we have the three persons of the Trinity all participating in this event. It was a work of love that they all enjoyed and that they were (and are) all committed to sustain and nurture. They have a plan. We get to play.

God said, "Let there be light." Notice that God actually spoke the universe into existence. There is power in words. There is particular power in the words of God. Why didn't God just think "Let there be light." Wouldn't it still have happened? Perhaps he did it for our benefit, to set us an example. There is commitment in speech. Speaking moves us beyond thinking that something is a good idea to a commitment to bring it about. This is particularly true relative to the things of the Kingdom of God. It also puts us out on a limb a bit, showing a reliance on the ability of the Father to bring something to pass. When God said "Let there be light," he had confidence in his ability to bring forth light from the darkness. When we say, "be healed," we have to have confidence in God's ability to bring about healing. Speaking such words shows our commitment to participate in God's creating and sustaining plan. And the fact that God allows us to speak such words shows that he is willing and anxious for us to participate. It's good stuff.

(Genesis 1:3-5) And God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening and there was morning – the first day.

Isn't it great that we serve a God that can bring forth light where there is no light!

God enjoyed his creation as he created it. He saw that the light was good. He liked it. How much richer we would be if we would all learn to enjoy our work rather than just try to do more of it. We should be able to stop every once in a while and say "That's good. I did a good job." It is a behavior that has been modeled for us by our creator.

Note that there was evening and then there was morning. Hebrews even today measure their days from sundown to sundown. The evening is the first part of a new day. It makes sense. Darkness came before light.

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German pronunciation.) Thus an alternate transliteration is "JHVH." This, taken with the vowels of the word Adonai (which is Hebrew for "Lord") comes out "Jehovah."

There has been debate over whether or not these creation days were literal 24-hour periods. (Note that the sun and the moon – the instruments we use to measure time – were not even created until the fourth "day.")

Think about the meanings of the word "day" in the Old Testament. We have day, which means a 24-hour period. We have day, which refers to that portion of a 24-hour period that is not night. We have day, which means an extended period of time (in the day of the Lord ...). Consider some of the following verses in the Old Testament that use the word "day" with somewhat different meanings:

God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning —the first day. Genesis 1:5 (Note – two different meanings in one verse.)

He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba. Genesis 26:33

Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. Genesis 27:2  
Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." Genesis 35:3

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. Genesis 39:10

Therefore, at this time tomorrow I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded till now. Exodus 9:18

"Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son." 1 Kings 21:29

that the evil man is spared from the day of calamity, that he is delivered from the day of wrath? Job 21:30

Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. Isaiah 13:6

With all of the meanings of the word "day" in the Old Testament, why in the creation story would we force it to necessarily refer to a 24-hour period?

The order of the events of creation are as follows.

- First Day

Separated light from darkness. Light was called "day" (use of the word where it does not mean a 24 hour period!) and darkness was called "night."

- Second Day

The sky – the atmosphere. The waters below the sky.

- Third Day

Dry land emerged from the sea. Vegetation emerged on the dry land.

- Fourth Day

Lights in the sky to separate day from night and to mark seasons and years and days (aha! the emergence of the concept of a 24 hour day). Special mention is made of the 2 great lights provided to give the earth light – the greater to give light in the day (the sun) and the lesser to give light at night (the moon).

- Fifth Day

The creatures in the sea and the birds in the air.

- Sixth Day

Animals, then man.

(Genesis 1:26-31) "Then God said, 'let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created him. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning – the sixth day."

- Seventh Day

(Genesis 2:2-3) "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."

Several observations.

- In days one through three, God created:

- light/darkness
- sky/sea
- land.

In days four through six, God created:

- stars to give light vs. darkness
- creatures of the sky/sea (birds and fishes)
- creatures of the land.

God is orderly and we can observe it in the order of creation.

- The creation of man was the climax of the effort. Man is the only creature created in the image of God and in his likeness. What does it mean to be created in the image and likeness of God?

It means that we have some of the same qualities as God (I said "some," not "all.") We have a soul. We have a will. We have the ability to choose. We were the only things created with the capacity to relate personally to God. We were the ones to which he wanted to relate. We were also created pure and free of sin, like God. God was excited about us. When he created everything else, he deemed it "good." When he created man, he deemed him "very good."

Notice the wording, "in the image of God he created him; male and female he created him." God did not create man (i.e. males) first and then as an afterthought create woman. Man (the species) was created in the image of God, which is male and female. That does not mean that we should start alternating between praying to our Father who art in heaven and our Mother who art in heaven (God himself is the one who chose for us to refer to him as "Father"), but it does mean that the nature of God consists of characteristics that we would consider to be basically male and characteristics that we would consider to be basically female. God is provider and nurturer. He is powerful yet gentle. He is warrior yet healer. In his wisdom, God created two types of people – men and women. Both are subsets of his image. When a man and a woman come together in a God-ordained marriage, in their union they more fully reflect the image of God. Together they are better equipped to participate in God's continuing creation (i.e. procreating and parenting) than either of them would be individually. Single men and women should not despair for never being able to be useful in the Kingdom, because it simply is not true. God has different callings and different plans for different individuals. But the fact is that a man and a woman rightly relating to God and to each other are likely to be more complete and more equipped to serve than either would be individually. That is why God ordained marriage.

- God gave man dominion over everything else he created. He trusted us with his creation. We should enjoy it but we should not misuse or abuse it.
- Judging from the passage, it seems that the original plan was for us to be vegetarians (the animals were also meant to be vegetarians). That does not necessarily mean that we should be now, because the dietary laws that followed after the fall of man included rules and regulations for eating meat. It would seem logical that when we have our resurrection bodies we will be vegetarians again.
- "Be fruitful and multiply" was God's idea. Sex is not dirty when it is enjoyed in marriage.
- On the seventh day he rested. Why? Does God get tired? I believe that this, again, was done primarily to model a behavior to us. God created us in such a manner that we need rest at regular intervals. He rested on the seventh day because he wants us to rest on the seventh day. Our physical bodies need it if we are to remain healthy and enjoy a long and fruitful life. Furthermore our souls need this rest. God not only rested on this day, but he made it holy. It is a day that we should make holy as well. It is a day that we should devote to renewing and to righting our relationship with him. It is not a day when we should exhaust ourselves with church committee meetings. Too many people have burned themselves out religiously by trying to make this a holy day in a very misguided manner.

### **1.3 The Second Creation Story – Adam and Eve**

Genesis 2:4-25

The chapter and verse divisions in the Bible were not always well placed (they were not part of the original text and were added hundreds of years after the fact). One such illogical division is where the beginning of chapter 2 was placed. The first three verses of the chapter give the

account of the seventh day of creation. They would more logically be included in chapter 1. Verse 4 begins a new section, which focuses on the creation of Adam and Eve.

Genesis gives two parallel creation accounts. The one in Genesis 1, which we have already considered, gives an overview of creation, telling what happened in each of the seven phases (or days) of creation. The creation account in chapter 2 goes into more detail about the creation of man. This account spans Genesis 2:4-25.

Verses 5, 6, and 10 indicate that in the early days of man's existence, rain did not occur. God provided for natural watering of plant life via the streams and rivers. Rain was not necessary. Although the Bible does not come out and state it, many people believe that the first time it rained was at the time of the flood (Noah). We will have more to say on this when we get to the section on the flood.

At some point, God made man. Verse 2:7 says, "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." I do not know that it is terribly significant that God formed us from the dust of the ground. It is a biological fact that our bodies are made up of natural elements – carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, potassium, hydrogen, iodine, sulfur, calcium, iron, etc. being the predominant elements in the human body. These are all elements that can be found in the dust of the ground. The significant part of this verse is that God breathed into us the breath of life. He did not do this with any of his other creatures – even those that do breathe. The word "breath," in Hebrew or on Greek, is synonymous with the word "spirit." God did make us breathe, but the more important fact is that he imparted to us a spirit that is capable of communing with his spirit. We became living beings unlike any of God's other living beings.

God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, to be the home for the man. The Garden of Eden was surrounded by the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris, and the Euphrates Rivers. There are no longer any rivers called the Pishon and the Gihon. We are not certain where they are or were. The Tigris and the Euphrates still exist. If the garden was somewhere near the current intersection of the Tigris and the Euphrates, this would put the Garden of Eden in the Middle East, somewhere near southern Iraq.

Verse 15 says that man was put in the garden with a job to do. He was to work the garden. Work is not something that man received as punishment after the fall. Man was created to do something useful. Work gives us a sense of purpose and a sense of accomplishment. Just as a life without rest is out of balance (thus the commandment to rest on the seventh day), a life without meaningful work is not fulfilling. Man had something productive to fill his time in the Garden of Eden. I believe it will be so in eternity.

The garden was full of trees that were pleasing to the sight and good for food. There are two special trees identified – the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What is special about these trees? Genesis 3:22 indicates that eating of the tree of life allowed man to live forever. There was something about the fruit of this tree that nourished a man's physical body and sustained him physically such that he would never die. I will say more about the tree of knowledge of good and evil when we get to chapter 3. For now, suffice it to say that this (the tree of knowledge of good and evil) is the only tree forbidden to them. They were not to eat from this tree. In fact, the only thing on the Adam and Eve "Don't List" was eating from this tree. Sometimes I think it would be really nice to have only one moral choice to make every day, but somehow or other I think I would still manage to mess it up. It is difficult to be too hard on Adam and Eve.

In verses 19 and 20, we are told that God presented all of the birds and animals to Adam (this was before Eve came into the picture) and let him name each of them. In the process, Adam

saw boy dog, girl dog, boy sparrow, girl sparrow, boy chimpanzee, girl chimpanzee. And he saw boy Adam, but no girl Adam. Something was missing from the picture. Verse 20 tells us "But for Adam no suitable helper was found." "Helper" is a good word. A spouse is a helper, not a servant or a master, but a helper.

God formed Eve from one of Adam's ribs. Why did he not simply form her from the dust of the ground, as he had formed Adam? I think this is significant. God used a part of Adam to form Eve. Apart from Eve, Adam is no longer whole. Women give birth to men, but man gave birth to woman. We are not complete without each other. We need each other. We are to be helpers.

Adam looked at Eve and said (verse 23) "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Eve was literally Adam's flesh. The end of chapter 2, (verse 24) gives a word of instruction that is part of many wedding ceremonies, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." A new marriage is like a new Adam and Eve. A man and woman need to break the bonds with parents (not cut off relationships but definitely alter the relationships) and cleave to one another. I do not think that the phrase, "become one flesh" has as much of a sexual connotation as a connotation of becoming complete in one another. Just as Eve was a part of Adam and they were only complete when they were together, so should it be with a new husband and wife.

Verse 25 says "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." I don't think that the "shame" and the "naked" necessarily go together (the sentence does not say "The man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame"). I think this means, "They were naked" (end of first thought) and "They felt no shame" (end of second thought). They were naked because there was no other way to be. They had never known anything else. It was not a big deal to them. They also felt no shame. There was no other way to be (nobody had ever done anything of which to be ashamed). They had never known anything else. It was not a big deal to them.

All of this would change in Chapter 3.

## **1.4 The Fall of Man**

Genesis 3

Enter the serpent. 3:1 says, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made." Is this simply a serpent or is it Satan? Or is it Satan masquerading as a serpent?

Normally we identify Satan as the tempter of Eve. We also normally identify Satan as a fallen angel rather than as a "wild animal the Lord God had made." Job 1:6 says "One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them." It does not say, "One day the wild animals came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them." Satan seems to have been angelic in origin. Yet Genesis 3 identifies the tempter of Eve as a serpent. Note that in 3:14 God says, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life." This seems to be a remark directed to a literal serpent, not to an angel.

So how do you bring these together? Was this just an ordinary serpent talking to Eve? Did the ancient people believe that serpents were devils? Is this just a literary picture?

It is my belief that this was Satan, appearing to Eve in the form of a serpent. Maybe he altered his form to appear as a serpent. Maybe he took over the body of a serpent for the duration of

the task. Who knows? The book of Revelation gives some insight into this. Revelation 12:9 says, "The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray." Revelation 20:2 says "He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years." Thus the closing book of the Bible positively identifies the serpent that appeared in the first book of the Bible (remember the tapestry and the threads that run from Genesis to Revelation).

More than likely, the serpent was not an intimidating creature when it all began. Before the fall, I do not believe that man really had to contend with fear. Animals did not kill each other (they were vegetarians). Eve would not have been intimidated by the presence of a serpent. On the other hand, Eve might have been put off a bit if Satan had appeared as himself and said "Hi. I'm the devil and I am here to lead you into the fall of man." Satan came to Eve in a form that would be familiar and comfortable to her. Satan still comes to us in forms that are familiar and comfortable to us. If he came any other way, we would have our defenses up and would be less vulnerable. We are much more likely to be led astray by the familiarity of friends or family members or the television in our own living rooms than by strangers.

When Satan appeared to Eve, his words to her were (3:1) "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" Satan knew exactly what God had said. He was not looking for clarification. He was trying to get Eve to doubt God's word. In fact, God had told them they could eat from any tree in the garden except one – the tree of knowledge of good and evil. His exact words in Genesis 2:16-17 were, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." It is also interesting to note that God gave this instruction to Adam before Eve was created. We may assume that Adam passed this information along to Eve and so for her it was second-hand information. Satan may have seen her as an easier target since she had not received the information first-hand. So Satan came to Eve and tried to paint a picture of God as a big bad party-pooper. "Did he really put all this delicious and beautiful fruit in the garden and tell you that you could not have any of it? Boy, he must be selfish, wanting to keep all the good stuff for himself."

The strategy has not changed much. Satan still operates in this way. How many examples could we find? An easy example is sex. God gave us the gift of sex but gave us boundaries on how it is to be enjoyed – within the confines of marriage. Satan whispers in people's ears, "Why does God not want you to enjoy your sexuality? He gives you these urges but then prevents you from ever getting them satisfied." If we follow his line of reasoning, we end up in premarital or extramarital affairs, the result of which is our own destruction. Satan's strategy is utterly predictable, and yet we – even believers – fall for it over and over and over.

And so Satan planted this seed of doubt and discontent in Eve. Her response is (3:2-3), "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" Notice that Eve did not accurately quote God. God never said anything about touching the tree. This bit of error is all that Satan needs to proceed.

In verses 4-5, Satan says, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Satan goes in for the kill. First of all, he calls God a liar by telling Eve that she would not die. Then he holds out to her the ultimate temptation. "Eat this and you will become like God. You will be able to discern right from wrong on your own and will not be dependent on him." And therein lies the sin of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

When it all began, we looked to God for instruction. He was the standard. If he said something was right we did it and if he said something was wrong we avoided it. Having his judgment on

things was enough for us. We needed no further direction. And then the time came when we decided we were too smart for this. We were perfectly capable of making our own decisions. We did not need God to tell us every little thing. We became our own moral standards and we became the ones who would decide what was right and what was wrong. In doing so, we rebelled against God. We pushed God off of his throne and sat down in his place. The trouble is that in God's Kingdom, there is only going to be one person in charge, and it is not any of us. We became unholy and incapable of the free interaction that man had with God in the Garden of Eden.

Verse 6 says "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." Eve looked the fruit over and it appealed to her on three fronts. It was good for food – appealing to fleshly needs. It was pleasing to the eye – appealing to sensual desires. It was desirable for gaining wisdom – appealing to the ego, the desire to become a god. She ate it and then immediately encouraged Adam to do the same. How typical it is that when we fall into sin we try to find companionship. Maybe we will not seem so bad if other people are in the same boat as we are. ("But officer, I was not going as fast as some of the other cars around me!") She freely ate it. Adam, who was there watching the whole thing, freely ate it. They were individually accountable for their actions. And after they did it, the first thing they felt was shame.

Verse 7 says, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." A new emotion entered the world – shame. Shortly after that they heard God approaching and another new emotion entered the world – fear. God came walking in the garden because he wanted to be with Adam and Eve. He loved them. He wanted their companionship. Even though the text does not specifically say so, I have the feeling that a third new emotion entered the world at this time – brokenheartedness. God's heart was broken when his creation rejected him. The words in verse 11 must have been spoken in agony rather than anger, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" If it were not so, God would not have spent the rest of time trying to woo the world back to him. He would not have sent Jesus to die a horrible death in our place.

When God asked this question to Adam and Eve, the responses that he got were classic Homo Sapiens. Adam says "The woman that YOU gave me made me do it." Eve says "Oh yea, well the serpent over there made me do it."

So God deals with the players in the order of culpability. He goes to the serpent first. In fact, there are two different parts to dealing with the serpent. As was stated, it seems that this was Satan either masquerading as a serpent or appearing in the actual body of a serpent. Anyway, God dealt both with the serpent and with Satan. Why did he deal with the serpent if Satan was the guilty party? Most likely, God cursed the serpent as a reminder to us of this tragic event. The serpent became a symbol of fear and evil to remind us that evil does exist and it is nasty and should be avoided as something fearful. Most people today are intimidated by serpents. Many are harmful or deadly. Even animals tend to be afraid of them. There is something about their very presence that is intimidating – even the ones that are not poisonous. I think God made them to become that way as a tangible reminder to us of the fall.

God also dealt with Satan. He said in Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." This is the first Messianic prophecy in the Bible. At the time the Bible was written, it was unusual to call someone the offspring of a woman. In fact, the ancient concept of reproduction was that man provided the seed and woman basically acted as an incubator. The point is that people were normally considered to be the offspring of a man, not a woman. Thus this was

unusual terminology – talking about one who would be the offspring of a woman (i.e. one who would have an earthly mother but not an earthly father). The verse is talking of one who would come and would be born of a woman but have no earthly father. This one would crush the head of Satan but would himself be struck by Satan. All of this was fulfilled in Christ at the cross.

God then turns to Eve and tells her that because of her role in this, child bearing would become a painful experience for her. The primary unique function that she brought to the relationship – childbearing – was affected. Her labor would be hard. She would also assume a role that is subject to her husband. Note that this is not God's ideal plan. When it began, he wanted them to be helpers – equals. In the fallen world, when they would not freely interact with him, it became necessary to have a hierarchy in the family. The husband was chosen as leader.

For Adam, work became toil. The primary unique function that he brought to the relationship – producing food for the family – was affected. His labor would be hard.

In verse 21, "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." As a result of the sin, the first shedding of blood took place. The skins had to come from somewhere. There was a blood sacrifice for this sin. It appears that with this shedding of blood the time came that men and animals became non-vegetarian.

God also drove Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, barring them from access to the tree of life. If they had access to the tree of life, they would live forever in a fallen state, separated from God. God could not bear to be separated forever from those he loves. He loves us too much to be separated from us for eternity. Thus we were made vulnerable to physical death.

God warned us. When we eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we die. It happens in phases. The moment they ate the fruit, they died spiritually. They lost the ability to commune with God freely. Their minds died over time. It took time to progress from thinking like God had taught them to thinking in the flesh. The physical death was the culmination of the process.

Thank God that he has provided a means to reverse this process. Our spirits are renewed the moment we receive Christ (justification). We receive anew the ability to commune with God freely. The renewing of our minds (sanctification) takes place over time. It takes time to progress from thinking in the flesh to thinking like God teaches us. The renewing of our bodies (glorification) will be the culmination of the process.

The fall of man was the greatest tragedy of all time. The effects of the fall of man were overcome in the greatest triumph of all time, the victory at the cross.

## **1.5 Cain and Abel**

Genesis 4-5

Adam and Eve had a son named Cain and then a son named Abel. They grew to be young men. At some point, Cain and Abel both made an offering to God. 4:3-5 tells us that Cain, who was a farmer, brought some grain as an offering. Abel, who kept the flocks, brought the best and the fattest firstborn of his flocks. God was pleased with Abel's offering but not with Cain's. This did not have anything to do with the fact that one brought animal and the other grain. It has to do with the quality of the offering and the spirit in which it was offered.

Cain was angry because his brother's offering had been deemed better than his. He was jealous. God warned Cain that his attitude was the problem and that he needed to get it in line. Cain decided to simply get rid of Abel and murdered him. God then approached Cain and asked him

where Abel was. Cain responded with the well-known line, "Am I my brother's keeper?" As punishment for his deed, God drove him out from his family and he became a wanderer. The work of his hands (trying to raise crops) would become useless and thus he would have to spend his life searching for food. Cain told God that the punishment was too severe. He was afraid that if he was forced to wander people who saw him would kill him. God said that he would put a mark on Cain so that people would leave him alone. A couple of questions might come up at this point.

First of all, who were these other people that might kill Cain? At this point, the only people we know about are Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel, and Abel is dead. Who is it that is going to kill him? Furthermore, in 4:17 it says that Cain and his wife had a son. From where did Cain's wife come? The answer to this seems to be in verse 5:4. The Bible specifically tells about the children of Adam named Cain and Abel and Seth, but it also tells us that Adam and Eve had other children. If Adam lived to be over 900 years old, then he had ample opportunity to have lots of children. Thus we assume that these other people who might take vengeance on Cain would have been his brothers and sisters or nieces and nephews, who might be seeking revenge for the way that their brother Abel was treated. We also assume that Cain's wife was his sister (or niece). (I know that does not work too well today, but in the beginning it was the only way it could work. We also know that it was not that unusual to marry a relative. Abram married his half-sister, Sarai. Nahor, Abram's brother, married his niece.)

The other question that might be asked at this point is what kind of a mark did God put on Cain to keep him from being killed? The answer is that we do not really know. Somehow or other, God put a physical sign on Cain that warned his brothers and sisters to leave him alone. 4:15 says that the people were warned that if anyone killed Cain they would receive vengeance seven times over. Somehow God was able to spare Cain the exact fate he inflicted on his brother.

At this point, Cain is cut off from the rest of his people. He essentially starts a new blood line. The text talks about the lineage of Cain and then resumes with the lineage of Adam, through Seth his next son.

Cain had Enoch and probably other sons and daughters. Enoch had Irad and probably other sons and daughters. Irad had Mehujael and probably other sons and daughters. Mehujael had Methushael and probably other sons and daughters. Methushael had Lamech and probably other sons and daughters. Lamech was the seventh generation. Lamech took two wives, which was contrary to God's plan. He was boastful about having killed another man. Lamech is presented as a very corrupt individual. Here in the seventh generation through the line of Cain we have a very corrupt race emerging.

But in 4:25-26, we learn that Adam and Eve had another son named Seth. Verse 26 tells us that the descendants of Seth began to call upon the name of the Lord, meaning that this line of Adam was more righteous. This line would produce Noah and Abraham and Moses and eventually Jesus.

Chapter 5 gives the descendants of Adam, through Seth, up to Noah. We see the lineage as follows: Adam -> Seth -> Enosh -> Kenan -> Mahalalel -> Jared -> Enoch -> Methuselah -> Lamech -> Noah. Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Except for Noah and his sons, the text also indicates that each of these had other sons and daughters.

Several points of interest: Note the extreme number of years that each of these men lived: 930 (Adam), 912 (Seth), 905 (Enosh), 910 (Kenan), 895 (Mahalalel), 962 (Jared), 365 (Enoch), 969 (Methuselah), and 777 (Lamech) years. We do not see ages like this after the flood. When we talk about the flood we will talk about why that is.

Methuselah is the oldest person in the Bible, having lived to the age of 969. Note that Methuselah lived 782 years after Lamech was born but Lamech only lived to the age of 777. Thus Methuselah died five years after Lamech died. We do not know it for a fact, but Methuselah could have died in the flood.

Also of interest is the information about Enoch, who only lived to be 365. 5:24 says "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more because God took him away." Enoch did not die a natural death. He was a righteous man and God took him to heaven without dying. He was the first person to be raptured.

This brings us to the time of Noah and of the global flood.

## **1.6 The Flood and Noah's Ark**

Genesis 6-10

The story of Noah's family and of the flood spans Genesis 6-10. The first part of chapter 6 tells how depraved the world had become by the time of Noah. The passage in Genesis 6:1-4 talks about the sons of God marrying and having children with the daughters of men. It mentions a race of people called the Nephilim. This passage is somewhat vague and Bible scholars are divided as to what exactly it means. Many believe that the "sons of God" are fallen angels – or demons – who are having sexual relationships with human women and producing children called Nephilim. The demons may have been inhabiting the bodies of human males at the time or they may have simply assumed the form of a man. The Nephilim were a strong and probably a physically big group of people. The text describes them as "heroes of old, men of renown." The people probably looked up to them as leaders. But they were the sons of demons and would have not led the people into righteousness.

This or any other interpretation is conjecture. What we can derive from the text for sure is that people had become very unholy. They did not seek God. God was in agony over the situation. Verse 6:6 says "The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth and his heart was filled with pain." God was grieved. He loved the creation that he had made in spite of the fact that it had become vile, but he knew he had to do something about it. The text continues in verse 6:7, "So the Lord said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth – men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air – for I am grieved that I have made them.'" God would obliterate his entire creation, all except for one man and his family – Noah. Verse 6:8 tells us that Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. In a pattern that would be repeated all throughout the Bible (a thread running from Genesis to Revelation), God would punish the masses for their wickedness but spare the righteous remnant to start over again.

Why Noah? We do not really know very much about his history – who he was and what he did prior to the flood. Verse 6:9 tells us, however, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God." That's all we need to know. If you want to find favor with God, then you do not need to do whatever it was that Noah did for a living. You do not have to have the same size family or come from the same part of the world. You do need to be righteous and blameless among your people and you need to walk with God.

God explained his plan to Noah. There would be a tremendous flood that would wipe out every living creature on the earth except for those spared with Noah. Noah was to build an ark – a very large boat, 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It would have three decks in it. Noah and his three sons and their wives were to be on the boat along with a pair (male and female) of every kind of earth-bound animal and bird. This would allow every species to continue.

This must have seemed very strange since at the time Noah was given these instructions it had never even rained. But Noah was faithful and did as he was told.

In verses 6:19-21 it says to take on board the ark two of every kind of animal. In the beginning of chapter 7 it says to take seven of every kind of clean animal and two of every kind of unclean animal. Why the discrepancy? Since clean animals could be eaten, I suppose that the extra animals could have been for food during the time they were in the ark.

When Noah was 600 years old, he and his family along with all of the animals entered the ark. In seven days it started to rain. It rained for 40 days and 40 nights and flooded the entire earth. Even the mountains were covered with water. All the people and the creatures on earth died. Birds died because they had no place to land or to get food. The floodwaters continued for 150 days after the rain. Eventually they began to recede. The ark came to rest on Mt. Ararat. Eventually it was dry enough for Noah and his family to come out of the ark.

God told them to come out and gave them the same instructions that he had originally given to Adam and Eve – be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Noah built an altar and made an offering to God. God smelled the aroma of the offering and was pleased. God made some promises to Noah. He promised never again to curse the ground because of man. He blessed Noah and his family. He set them up as the "head creatures" and said that all other creatures would fear them. Other living creatures would be food to them. They were admonished, however, not to eat the blood of animals. God strictly forbade that. God made a covenant never to destroy the world via flood again. He gave the rainbow as a sign of the covenant so that whenever the rainbow appears, God and man might be reminded of this covenant.

Thus the sons of Noah became the fathers of the nations of the earth. The text tells us that Ham was the patriarch of the Canaanites. Shem was the ancestor of Abraham. The term 'Semitic' refers to the descendants of Shem. Chapter 10 gives specific information about the sons of Shem, Ham, and Japheth and tells the nations that came out of their descendants.

Sometime after they were back on the land, Noah planted a vineyard. After it had produced grapes Noah had turned some of the fruit of the vine into wine. Noah got drunk on the wine one day and fell asleep in his tent, naked. Ham saw his father's nakedness. Rather than respecting his father and simply covering him or somehow concealing his condition, Ham went and told his brothers what he had seen. His brothers, Shem and Japheth, did not look but walked backwards into their father's tent and covered him with a blanket, concealing his nakedness. When Noah woke up and found out what had happened, he cursed Ham and declared that his descendants would be slaves to the descendants of his brothers – particularly of Shem. We see this fulfilled in the time of Joshua, when the descendants of Shem drove the descendants of Ham out of the Promised Land.

Noah lived to be 950 years old. He is the last person in the Bible to live to such an extreme number of years. After this the age at which people died began to decrease rapidly. Why is that?

When God was bemoaning the situation before the flood, he said in Genesis 6:3, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years." God intended to knock the average age of man down to a fraction of what it had been before. Men had been living into their 900s but God intended to curtail the average age to around 120 years.

Some have conjectured that in the beginning, the earth was not tilted on its axis. There were no seasons. The atmosphere of the earth was surrounded by a thick cloud covering around the earth that provided a constant supply of dew to water the earth (there was no rain). The cloud covering also absorbed much of the damaging effects of the sun. It served as insulation that provided a fairly uniform temperature throughout the earth. It was sort of like living in a terrarium. Secular science has indicated that much of what we know as aging is in fact negative side effects of exposure to the sun. In a more perfect environment, science supposes that man could live indefinitely – certainly into the hundreds of years. Other animals – such as lizards and other reptiles – continue to grow throughout their lives. If reptiles could live to be hundreds of years old and continued to grow, they could well be the size of what we call dinosaurs.

It is presumed that a time came when this order was upset, perhaps by a large meteor striking the earth and knocking it off its axis. This cataclysmic event disturbed the cloud covering and turned it into rain – the covering fell to earth. This caused the flood. We lost our natural protection from the sun and thus men began to live shorter lives after the flood. Because the earth is now tilted on its axis, we have the extremes of seasons, which adds to the aging process.

Is there any evidence to support this or is it just an attempt to bend data to match a theory? Men have found beneath the ice of the north and south poles well-preserved tropical plants that grew there at some point in history – plants that would now be found only near the equator. At some point, atmospheric conditions were such that these plants could grow in these regions of the world. As I have already said, science has suggested that men could live much, much longer if they could be shielded from the negative, aging effects of the sun and the environment. Geological evidence supports the idea of a massive flood at some point in history. As I stated in the introduction, cultures other than Judeo-Christian cultures have traditions of a global flood. One must account for all of these things somehow.

It does not matter to me whether there was a cloud covering or whether or not dinosaurs were really overgrown lizards. I find the explanation interesting and plausible, but what matters to me is that God destroyed the wicked masses but preserved his faithful remnant. It matters to me that God is mighty and sovereign enough to pronounce judgment over all mankind or to play with the tilt of the earth's axis if it serves his purpose. It matters to me that God loves me so much that my wickedness can grieve his heart. That matters to me a great deal.

## **1.7 The Tower of Babel**

Genesis 11:1-9

We do not know how much time elapsed between the flood and the building of the Tower of Babel. It must have been several generations – time enough to build up a new population of people.

When Noah's family came out of the ark, they were a single race and spoke a single language. At some point, they began to forget God and to think of themselves as self-important (if you haven't picked up on it by now, this same pattern repeats itself quite a bit in the Bible). So they began to unify themselves into a large city and they began to build a tower that would reach to the heavens.

Now why was that such a big deal? Is there something wrong with cities or with towers? Well, not necessarily. The sin of the Tower of Babel is found in verse 11:4, "Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'" The tower represented several things that were wrong:

- It was a testimonial to their own greatness. They were extolling their own virtues ("so that we may make a name for ourselves"). They were essentially worshipping themselves and looking to themselves for greatness rather than to God.
- "Let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens." Heaven is the domain of God. They were trying to take it by their own means. The serpent told Eve that if she would eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she would become like God, and she fell for it. Her attempt at taking God's throne failed. The builders of the Tower of Babel were attempting to take God's throne as well. It would also fail.
- The tower may have been an attempt to build a safe place where the leaders could go to preserve themselves in case another flood came. If so, it was man's attempt to preserve himself and represented unbelief in God's promise not to flood the earth again.
- "And not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." The leaders of this project wanted to unify the people behind their vision of self-aggrandizement and of storming the gates of heaven. People who might not really believe in the project were probably being forced to participate in it against their will.

In Revelation, we see a coming time of a one-world government where people will be forced to participate in the schemes of the leaders. It will be a time when people reject God in favor of human leaders. It will be a time when people feel very self-important. The Tower of Babel is an ancient foreshadowing of this time.

God knew that this was not a time for men to unite, so he caused division among them. He confused their tongues, which meant that he supernaturally gave them different languages. All of the sudden, in a miraculous moment, some men spoke (and understood) one language and some men another. Men may have been working side-by-side on the building project one moment and the next moment found themselves completely incapable of communicating. The masses of people could not understand the leaders who were pressing them to work on the tower. They certainly felt no unity with these people whom they could not understand. They most likely found other people who ended up with the same language as themselves and went off and started a new community somewhere else.

Notice that Chapter 10 tells where the various descendants of Noah settled. I think it is likely that the first part of Chapter 11 (which tells of the Tower of Babel) is an explanation of why the dispersion in Chapter 10 took place. The clans of Noahites may have stayed together for several generations, decided to build the Tower of Babel, had their tongues confused, and at that point disbursed as described in Chapter 10.

It is conjecture on my part, but it seems plausible to me that when God gave the new languages, he may also have given new racial characteristics to people. He may have confused the genetic pool at the same time as the tongues. Perhaps men did not look different physically right after the event of the confusing of the tongues, but children born after that event may have begun to show new racial features.

## **1.8 Enter Abraham**

Genesis 11:10-32

The second part of Chapter 11 tells us that Shem (the son of Noah) begat Arphaxad. Arphaxad begat Shelah. Shelah begat Eber. Eber begat Peleg. Peleg begat Reu. Reu begat Serug. Serug begat Nahor. Nahor begat Terah. Terah had three sons, named Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Terah lived in Ur of the Chaldees, which later became part of the Babylonian Empire and today is probably somewhere in southern Iraq. While they still lived in Ur, Haran had a son named Lot and daughters named Milcah and Iscah. Haran died. Abram married a woman named Sarai, who was barren. Nahor married his niece, Milcah.

Terah packed up his family and moved with the intention of heading to Canaan. Why he did this we are not exactly sure. The text does not tell us. They only got as far as the city of Haran, however (Terah had a son named Haran but this is the city named Haran). Haran is probably today in the area near Syria. For whatever reason, they settled in Haran and Terah died there. We are not sure how long they stayed in Haran, but the text seems to imply that they were there for a considerable time (Genesis 12:5 says that they accumulated wealth while in Haran).

### 1.8.1 The Call of Abraham

Genesis 12:1-9

We do not know exactly what motivated Terah to leave Ur, but we do know that God wanted them in Canaan. Abram had settled in Haran, short of where God wanted him to be. In 12:1-3, God speaks to Abram. "The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"

Abram was 75 years old with a barren wife and God promised to make him into a great nation. God promised him great things, but he had to act. And that he did. He packed up his belongings and his wife and took his nephew Lot (the son of Haran, who had died) and left for Canaan. When they got there they traveled through the land, which was occupied. God told him in 12:7, "To your offspring I will give this land."

### 1.8.2 Abraham in Egypt

Genesis 12:10-20

They found famine in the land of Canaan and went to Egypt for a time to escape the famine. Abram was afraid to go there because his wife, Sarai, was beautiful and he was afraid that the Egyptians might kill him so that they could have her. He asked her to tell everyone that she was his sister rather than his wife. She agreed. (In Genesis 20:12, we learn that this was not completely a lie – Sarai was Abram's half-sister. But primarily she was his wife.)

Sure enough, when they got there, the Pharaoh found her to be beautiful and took her into his harem. He gave Abram many gifts – livestock, etc. – as a favor in exchange for his "sister." We assume that the next part of the story took place before the Pharaoh had sexual relations with Sarai. God inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household. He wanted to know why. Somehow or other he figured out that it was because Sarai was married. He summoned Abram and chastised him for not being truthful with him. He sent Abram and Sarai and their people and things along their way.

Now why did Abram lie? He had just received this great promise from God and seemed to be acting in great faith. Did he think that God could not protect him in Egypt? The reason is simple. Abram was a man, just like you and me. He was chicken. His faith ran hot and cold, just like ours does. The Bible is a true history of what happened and not a superhero adventure comic

book. The fact is that God is able to use the chickens of this world (you and me) to accomplish great things. We need to be involved in an ever-on-going process of learning to trust God.

### 1.8.3 Lot Moves On

Genesis 13-14

After leaving Egypt, Abram and his traveling companions moved back to the land of Canaan. Abram was quite wealthy and had much livestock and herdsman. Lot, his nephew, was also wealthy in the same manner. It became difficult for them to travel together because the land could not support the great number of animals that needed to feed off of it. Furthermore, the herdsman of Abram frequently quarreled with those of Lot. Abram and Lot did not want to be at odds with one another (they probably had a relationship very much like a father-son relationship). They agreed to separate. Abram told Lot that he could choose whatever direction he wanted to go and Abram would go the other way. Lot thought it over and headed towards the Jordan River. Specifically, he made a very worldly decision and settled just outside of Sodom. 13:13 says "Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord." Sodom was a materialistic city where the rich did not care for the poor. It was a place of great sexual immorality. Sound familiar?

Abram and his people headed the other way. God spoke to him and said (13:14-17) "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." Remember that this was being spoken to a man approaching 80 years in age who was married to a barren woman. It was also spoken to the man who became the patriarch of both the Jews and the Arabs and a spiritual forefather to the Christians. Abram settled in the area of Hebron, where he eventually would be buried.

Note that in 13:12, it says that "Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom." By verse 14:12, it says, "he was living in Sodom." A good rule of thumb is that if you hang out near evil and immorality, soon you will be in evil and immorality. Such was the case with Lot.

In chapter 14, we find that the kings of some cities in the area banded together and went to war against some kings of other cities in the area. Sodom was one of the cities they targeted. They captured Sodom and took the wealth and some of the residents as bounty. Lot was among those taken. Word got back to Abram and he decided to rescue his nephew. Verse 14:14 says that Abram was able to summon 318 trained men born in his household. We had deduced that Abram was rich, but he must have been extraordinarily rich to have enough servants that he could summon 318 soldier-aged males that were born in his household. He gathered his army and went after the men that had taken Lot captive.

It is interesting that his band of 318 soldiers was able to defeat this combined army of four kings (Amraphel of Shinar, Arioch of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer of Elam, and Tidal of Golin). These were kings of cities, not of countries, so their armies would not have been huge, but their four armies combined would have certainly outnumbered Abram's men. The fact is that God had promised to bless those that bless Abram and curse those who curse him. God was on their side. Abram's descendants should have taken comfort from that when they were ready to take the land after the Exodus. Anyway, Abram and his men defeated the four armies. They took back the people and possessions that had been taken by these four marauding kings.

On the way back from the battle, Abram is greeted by the mysterious figure called Melchizedek. Verses 14:18-20 say, "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was

priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."

Who is this? Melchizedek appears again in Psalm 110 and then again in Hebrews Chapter 7. Psalm 110:4 says:

The LORD has sworn  
and will not change his mind:  
"You are a priest forever,  
in the order of Melchizedek."

Hebrews 7 says:

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "King of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people – that is, their brothers – even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. ... One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of he priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared:

"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

So back to my question, "Who is this?" Melchizedek was king and high priest, a role fulfilled in the Messiah. He was king of Salem. Salem is another name for the city of Jerusalem. "Salem" is also a variant spelling of "shalom," which is Hebrew for "Peace." Melchizedek was a king from Jerusalem who would represent peace (ah, Prince of Peace, perhaps?). Abram paid homage to him and gave him a tithe of the goods captured in the battle. Melchizedek blessed Abram. He represented a non-Levitical priesthood that was able to bring permanent righteousness that the Levitical priesthood never could. Was Melchizedek Jesus? We are not sure. Melchizedek was either a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ (Christophany) or he was a strong type figure of Christ. In Genesis, not much is said about him. Most of what we know about him we learn from the writer of Hebrews. For a fuller discussion of Melchizedek, see the section on Hebrews 6-7 in Thy Kingdom Come, by Tim Attaway.

After Abram had his encounter with Melchizedek, he gave back to the kings of the conquered cities the spoil that he had recovered (minus, I suppose, the 10% that he gave to Melchizedek). Lot returned to Sodom and Abram went home.

## 1.8.4 God's Covenant with Abram

### Genesis 15

Chapter 15 of Genesis contains a dramatic description of the covenant that God made with Abram. A covenant was a legal contract. It was normally sealed in blood – the blood of an animal. In Abraham's day, when two people wanted to enter into a legal agreement, they would sacrifice an animal, such as a calf. They would cut it in two pieces and lay the pieces on the ground with some room in the middle. Both parties entering into the covenant would walk through the path between the pieces as a symbol of voluntarily walking into the covenant agreement. The blood was symbolic of the punishment that was warranted by breaking the terms of the covenant.

At the beginning of Chapter 15, Abram is bemoaning the fact that he has no natural heir. It was common in those days that if a man died with no heir, his estate would pass to his chief servant. Abram is assuming that his estate and thus his promise must pass to his chief servant, Eleazar of Damascus. After all, Abram and Sarai are well beyond childbearing years. How else could things happen?

God reassures Abram in verses 15:4-5. "Then the word of the Lord came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.' He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'"

Verse 15:6 says, 'Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.' Abram was not a righteous man. We saw how he lied to the Pharaoh of Egypt. We will see that he will pull that trick again before long. He was a fallible human. But because he was willing to take God at his word, God credited that faith to him as righteousness. Paul discusses the importance of this in Romans 4.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ...

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ...

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he

faced the fact that his body was good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Abram's righteousness (right standing before God) was not a result of any works on Abram's part, but was given to him by God because of the faith that he had in God. It works the same way with us. The only way we can be in a right relationship with God is to trust him at his word that he has provided the means, in Jesus Christ, for us to be righteous.

God was making a covenant with Abram. He told Abram to bring sacrificial animals for the covenant. Abram did so and cut them in two. Then God, and God alone, walked through the trail between the pieces, sealing the covenant. Abram was not required to walk through. God was putting his life on the line for the sake of the covenant but did not require Abram to do the same.

God also used the opportunity to tell Abram what would happen to his descendants in Egypt. Verses 15:13-16 say,

Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

The reference to the Amorites is a bit cryptic. At the end of the wandering in the desert, right before they entered the Promised Land, the Israelites tried to pass through the territory of the Amorites. The Amorites would not allow them to pass. As a result, the Israelites wiped out the Amorites and took their land (see Numbers 21). God has all things tied together neatly and I suppose he planned to use the event of the exodus to punish the Amorites for their wickedness.

### 1.8.5 Hagar and Ishmael

Genesis 16

Sarai knew the promise that God had given to Abram. In Chapter 15, God had assured Abram that his heir would be a son from his own body. Sarai could not make sense of this since she was well beyond normal childbearing years. So, in Chapter 16, she took matters into her own hands.

It was not uncommon in those days for a man to bear children through his wife's maidservant. The child would normally be treated as if he or she was the son or daughter of the wife rather than the maidservant. Sarai felt that this was the manner in which she would have a son. She had a servant named Hagar. Sarai proposed the idea to Abram that he have sexual relations with Hagar so that she could become pregnant and bear a son – a son that would in essence become Sarai's child. Abram agreed.

Hagar became pregnant. From what we can gather from the text, Hagar became "uppity" when she became pregnant. We can imagine that she flaunted her condition in front of Sarai and

rubbed her nose in the fact that Hagar could become pregnant but Sarai could not. Sarai did the only logical thing that she could and blamed this all on Abram. After all, this was his idea, right? Abram reciprocated by doing the only logical thing he could – he refused to get involved. In 16:6 he says to Sarai, "Do with her whatever you think is best." So Sarai began to mistreat Hagar. Hagar ran away.

An angel found Hagar in the desert and told her to go back and submit to Sarai. Then he gave her a bit of prophecy that still carries major ramifications today. In verses 16:10-12 we read,

The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants they will be too numerous to count."

The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord had heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.

"Ishmael" means "God hears." Ishmael became the patriarch of the Arab nations. They are too numerous to count and throughout history have lived in hostility towards their brothers, the Jews.

So Hagar returned and bore the son and named him Ishmael. Abram was 86 when his first child was born.

### 1.8.6 The Covenant of Circumcision

#### Genesis 17

Thirteen years later, God appeared to Abram. He came to confirm the covenant he had made earlier. He changed his name from Abram, which means "exalted father," to Abraham, which means "father of many nations." He affirmed to Abraham that he would indeed be the father of many nations. He assured him that kings would come from him and that the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants.

As a sign of the covenant, he told Abraham that he and Ishmael and any male living in his household (Abraham had many servants) must be circumcised. Furthermore, from that day forward, any male born into the household (eventually any male born into the nation) would be circumcised on the eighth day. Any male not circumcised would not be part of the covenant and would be cut off from the blessings of God.

He also instructed Abraham that Sarai's name would be changed to Sarah, which means "princess." He assured Abraham that the child of promise – the child of the covenant – would still come from Sarah's womb even though she was already 90 years old at the time this took place. Sarah would have a son in a year's time and would name him Isaac, which means "laughter" or "he laughs." God assured Abraham that he remembered Ishmael and that Ishmael would also become the father of nations, but that Isaac was the child of promise, the one through whom the covenant would be fulfilled.

Abraham took care of seeing that every male in the household was circumcised that very day. Abraham was 99 when he was circumcised and Ishmael was 13.

### 1.8.7 Three Visitors Appear to Abraham

Genesis 18

In Genesis Chapter 18, three visitors appear to Abraham. One of these is identified as the Lord. We assume from the text that one of these visitors is God himself appearing as a man (a Theophany) and the other two are angels appearing as men.

When they appear, Abraham urges them to rest for a while and to let him provide a meal for them. They agree. Abraham gets Sarah to prepare them something to eat. While they were eating, the Lord told Abraham that he would return in about a year and at that time Sarah would have borne a son. Sarah overheard the conversation and laughed to herself because she knew that she was well beyond being able to bear children. The Lord knew that Sarah had laughed at the idea and asked her why. She denied having laughed. The Lord said, "Yes, you did laugh." He said, "Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son."

The Lord then reveals to Abraham that he is about to continue his journey and that his destination is the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He said that the wickedness of these cities was causing a stench that went all the way to heaven. He was going to assess the situation first-hand. Abraham understood this to mean that he was going to deal with these cities – bring judgment. Abraham also knew that he had a nephew living in Sodom. He began to ask the Lord for some leniency. He asked the Lord if he would spare the city if 50 righteous people could be found in it. The Lord said that he would. He then asked if only 45 righteous people could be found would the city be spared. Again the Lord agreed that the city would be spared if it contained 45 righteous people. Abraham kept asking with lower and lower numbers and eventually the Lord agreed to spare the city if as few as 10 righteous people could be found. Then the Lord and his two companions went on their way.

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." Salt has two functions. It is a preservative. It is also a flavoring agent. When you put salt on food, the food is supposed to have its flavor altered by the salt. The salt is not supposed to have its flavor altered by the food. If that were the case, then the salt would be useless as a flavoring agent. If the salt has lost its salty qualities, it is also unable to preserve the food. It is useless. Children of God are supposed to be the same way. We should flavor the world around us rather than taking on the flavor of the world. We should also act as a preservative for the world around us. We should be that righteous presence that will bring the Lord's favor. If we fail to do these things, then we are no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

Unfortunately, God was unable to find 10 "salty" people in Sodom and Gomorrah.

### 1.8.8 The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

Genesis 19

Before they arrived in Sodom the Lord left the two angels. In Chapter 19 we see that just the two angels arrived in Sodom. When they entered the city, they just "happened" to run into Lot (divine appointment). Lot invited them to spend the night in his home. He took them in and prepared them a meal. Soon the men of the town gathered outside Lot's door and demanded that he bring these two men outside so they could have sex with them – commit homosexual rape. Lot told them that he could not do that and offered them his two virgin daughters instead.

In that day and age, there were no hotels. Boarding travelers, who were often strangers, in one's home was common. The burden of comfort and safety for the guests was the responsibility of the host. Lot had a responsibility to protect these strangers in his home. I understand that. In my mind, however, I cannot rationalize this responsibility as being an excuse for offering his daughters to these men. I have trouble seeing this as anything other than an act of incredible cowardice and a sign that Lot did not care that much about his daughters. Surely he had a responsibility for their safety as well. An incident very similar to this occurs in Judges 19:22-24 and the men in the story act with similar cowardice.

The two visitors had seen all that they needed to see. They struck the men outside the door with blindness. They told Lot to gather any people that were his and prepare to leave the city because it was going to be destroyed. His daughters were pledged to be married. Lot informed the sons-in-law-to-be that they needed to flee the city with them but they did not believe him and stayed. Lot, his wife, and his daughters fled the city. The angels told them to flee – don't look back; just get out.

They departed for a near-by town. Burning sulfur began to rain down from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah, destroying the cities. Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt.

What is this all about? Lot never had any business settling in Sodom in the first place. It was wicked before he got there and it was still wicked when he left. At first he merely pitched his tent near Sodom but at the time he left he was a full-fledged member of the community and his daughters were pledged to be married to men of Sodom. It was wrong to settle there and the only way to redeem the situation was to get out and never look back. Never daydream about life in Sodom. Never feel homesick for the place. Never rue what you left behind. And that is exactly what Lot's wife did. She did not really want to leave. Therefore she received the same sort of destruction that the other people in the city received.

Lot and his daughters settled near a city named Zoar. Lot's daughters had no husbands and were concerned about the continuation of the family line. They formulated a plan. One night they got Lot drunk and one of the daughters had sexual relations with him. The next night again they got him drunk and the other daughter had sexual relations with him. They both got pregnant. One of them bore a son and named him Moab. He became the patriarch of the Moabites. The other had a son and named him Ben Ammi. He became the patriarch of the Ammonites.

### 1.8.9 Abraham and Abimelech

#### Genesis 20

In Genesis Chapter 20, Abraham and Sarah are traveling again. Once more he was afraid that men might kill him in order to take Sarah because she was beautiful. He told everyone she was his sister. Abimelech was king of Gerar, a city in the area. He sent for Sarah to take her into his harem. Again, before he had sexual relations with her, God came to him in a dream and warned him to leave her alone – that suffering would come on his household because she was already a married woman. Abimelech sent her back to Abraham and gave him gifts just to get him to go away.

Why did Abraham do this again? Because he did not have total faith in God's willingness to protect him. Abraham was a man. He fouled up, just like we do. Still, God was able to work with him and accomplish great things through him. We should take comfort in that. We do not have to be perfect before God is able to use us.

### 1.8.10 Enter Isaac

Genesis 21

At the appointed time, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. As required by the covenant with God, he was circumcised on the eighth day.

Later, Abraham held a feast to celebrate the weaning of Isaac. At the feast, Sarah saw Ishmael making fun of Isaac. She made Abraham get rid of Hagar and Ishmael, saying that Ishmael would have no part in her son's inheritance. This was a difficult thing for Abraham to do, because Ishmael was also his son and he loved him. God reassured Abraham that he would take care of Ishmael and reminded him that God still intended to make a nation of Ishmael's descendants. So Abraham did send them away and God watched over them while they were in the desert.

Abraham entered into a peace treaty with Abimelech and lived in peace among the Philistines in Beersheba.

### 1.8.11 The Testing of Abraham - The Sacrifice of Isaac

Genesis 22:1-19

When Isaac was somewhat older (we are not sure how old), God came to Abraham and told him to take Isaac to Mount Moriah and to sacrifice him there. What a terrible thing! Here is Abraham's child of promise, the child of his old age. Here is the son for which Abraham had waited his entire life. He was finally here and getting to an age where Abraham could really relate to him, teach him things, talk to him, etc. And God wants Abraham to kill him.

In fact, God never intended for Abraham to harm Isaac. He intended to test Abraham. Isaac was a precious gift that God had given to Abraham. Had the gift become more important to Abraham than obedience to God? God had also promised Abraham that Isaac would be the child who would inherit the promise. Did Abraham believe God enough to trust him to fulfill that word in spite of what was happening now? God was testing Abraham to see how he answered these questions.

Abraham was obedient. The next day, Abraham and Isaac and some servants set out for Mount Moriah, which is in Jerusalem (the site of the Temple Mount – currently the Dome of the Rock sits on Mount Moriah). The journey took several days. When they got close, Abraham told the servants to wait while he and Isaac went and made the sacrifice together. At this point, a great deal of Messianic prophecy happens.

First of all, the idea of a father sacrificing his son is exactly what happened at the cross. In 22:6 we read "Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac." Isaac was carrying the wood to the place of the offering, just as Jesus carried his cross to the place of his sacrifice. In verses 7 and 8 we read,

Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and the wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."

The idea of God providing an offering for us is Messianic. Then as Abraham was about to bring his knife down on Isaac, God stopped him. They looked and God had provided a ram for the offering. The ram was a substitutional sacrifice – to be offered in the place of Isaac. Christ was the ultimate substitutional offering, given in place of each of us.

Because Abraham had done what God required, God renewed his promise to Abraham to bless him, make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, give his descendants the land, and to bless the world through his offspring.

### 1.8.12 Nahor's Sons

Genesis 22:20-24

The end of chapter 22 talks about the descendants of Nahor, Abraham's brother. He had married his niece, Milcah, and she had given him eight sons. One of those sons was named Bethuel, and he had a daughter named Rebekah. She would later become Isaac's wife.

### 1.8.13 The Death of Sarah

Genesis 23

Sarah died in Hebron at the age of 127. Abraham grieved for her and began to make preparations for burial. He had no place to lay her because he was an alien in the land. The entire time he had been in the land of Canaan, he had been living on other people's land. He had been migrant. Now he needed a permanent place to lay Sarah's body. He asked the men of Hebron to help him find a place. They said that he could bury Sarah in the choicest of tombs in the area – for free. Abraham insisted that he buy the place where she would be buried. He chose the Cave of Machpelah, which is in Hebron. Today it is known as the Tomb of the Patriarchs. He bought the cave and the land around it. This is the only piece of the Promised Land that Abraham actually ever owned.

## 1.9 Isaac

At this point, the main character in Genesis shifts to Isaac. Abraham is still alive but it becomes Isaac's story beginning in chapter 24.

### 1.9.1 Isaac and Rebekah

Genesis 24

Genesis 17:17 indicates that Sarah was about 10 years younger than Abraham. Genesis 21:5 says that Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. That would make Sarah about 90 when he was born. 23:1 says that Sarah died at the age of 127, which would have made Isaac around 37 years old at her death. Abraham felt it was time his son had a wife.

Abraham summoned Eleazar, his faithful servant. He is the one who would have been Abraham's heir if Abraham had not had any children. He could have been bitter towards the children (Ishmael and Isaac) but instead he remained true and loyal to the family. Abraham tasked Eleazar with going back to the land of his fathers to find a wife for Isaac – a woman from his own people (i.e. he did not want Isaac marrying a Canaanite woman). Verse 24:3 describes a custom that would be very unusual to us. Abraham made Eleazar put his hand under Abraham's

thigh and take an oath. In those days, taking an oath in this manner symbolized that if the oath were not fulfilled, the children of the recipient of the pledge would seek vengeance against the one doing the pledging – in essence if Eleazar did not fulfill his oath Isaac would punish him.

Eleazar agreed to the oath and took some of Abraham's possessions as gifts as he headed out to the city of Nahor, where Abraham's brother lived. Eleazar asked God to give him a sign of who the proper woman would be. He asked God to reveal it in the following way. He would ask a woman for a drink. If she gave the drink and volunteered to water his camels as well, she would be the one. Before he had even finished praying about this, Rebekah approached (they were near a well). Eleazar asked her for a drink and she gave it and offered to water his camels as well. Well, he was excited! He asked her who she was and discovered that she was the granddaughter of Abraham's brother. This was great! They went to her home and told everyone what had happened. Bethuel and Milcah (her parents) and Laban (her brother) were there. They all knew that this was from God. They agreed to let Rebekah go and she agreed to go.

They set out the next day to return to Isaac and Abraham. As they approached home, Isaac happened to be somewhere on the road, sitting and meditating. In 24:64-66 we read:

Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?"

"He is my master," the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself.

Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

## 1.9.2 The Death of Abraham

Genesis 25:1-11

Abraham lived to the age of 175, which meant he lived 38 years after the death of Sarah. He took another wife, Keturah, who bore him more sons: Zimran, Jokshan (descendants were the Asshurites, the Letushites, and the Leummites), Medan, Midian (descendants were the Midianites), Ishbak, and Shuah. Abraham truly became the father of many nations. He gave gifts to his sons while he was alive and eventually sent them away. His inheritance went entirely to Isaac. When he died, Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the Cave of Machpelah, at Hebron. (Note that this implies that Ishmael stayed in touch.)

## 1.9.3 Ishmael's Sons

Genesis 25:12-18

Interestingly enough, Ishmael had 12 sons, producing the 12 tribes of Ishmael. Ishmael died at the age of 137. His descendants lived in hostility towards Isaac and his descendants. Not much has changed.

## 1.9.4 Enter Jacob and Esau

Genesis 25:19-34

Verse 25:20 places Isaac at age 40 when he married Rebekah. She was barren. Isaac prayed for her and God opened her womb and she conceived twins. The babies wrestled within her. She asked God what was happening. He spoke to her (25:23):

The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

When they were born, Esau (which means "the hairy one") was born first and Jacob came out right after, clutching Esau's heel. He was trying to grab Esau's place from the beginning.

Esau grew up to be a hunter. Jacob was more of a homebody. Isaac loved Esau more and Rebekah loved Jacob more. What a sad state of affairs when the parents openly choose one sibling over another. No wonder there was a certain amount of hostility between the brothers.

Once Esau was out hunting and came home very hungry. Jacob was cooking some stew. He asked Jacob for some stew. Jacob said he could have some if Jacob could have his birthright. Esau, who did not esteem his birthright very much, threw it away to fill his belly.

The birthright was important. It naturally belonged to the firstborn son. The person with the birthright ultimately became the head of the family. The family line would be carried on through him. He received a double portion of his father's estate. Along with that portion came the responsibility of caring for the widow, younger brothers, unmarried sisters, etc. The birthright in this particular family had more important implications. Not only would the family line be carried on by the holder of the birthright, but also the promise of Abraham would be inherited by that person. Esau was willing to give it up for a bowl of soup.

An interesting thing is happening here. God had already revealed to Rebekah that he would pass the birthright to Jacob anyway. Jacob did not need to manipulate his way into it. What Jacob was doing was wrong even though in the end it was in line with God's plan. Jacob was a manipulator and would have to deal with this aspect of his personality later in life.

Verse 25:26 tells us that Isaac was 60 years old when his sons were born. Rebekah's period of barrenness lasted 20 years into their marriage.

## 1.9.5 Isaac and Abimelech

Genesis 26

Because of a famine, Isaac moved to the land of the Philistines, and found himself in the territory governed by Abimelech – just as his father had once done. God told Isaac not to go to Egypt and God affirmed to Isaac that the promises once given to Abraham now belonged to him – to inherit the land and that his descendants would be numerous.

Isaac had learned one thing from his father. When they got to the land of the Philistines, Isaac told everyone that Rebekah was his sister because he was afraid people might kill him to get to her. Fortunately, nobody took her (as happened to Sarah twice). Abimelech did see Isaac caressing Rebekah in a way that a man does not caress his sister, so Abimelech figured out that they were husband and wife. He chastised Isaac for not being honest and warned everyone else to leave her alone (he had learned his lesson at the time he tried to take Sarah into his harem.)

While they were there, God blessed Isaac financially. His crops came in abundantly and he grew quite wealthy. He grew so wealthy, in fact, that Abimelech asked him to leave because he was growing too powerful. They left. They found a place where they wanted to settle. They dug a well. The Philistines argued that the water belonged to them, so Isaac moved again. God appeared to Isaac and confirmed to him again that the promises given to Abraham now belonged to him.

Shortly after that, Abimelech came to Isaac. Isaac asked him why he had come after rudely forcing him to leave before. Abimelech replied that it was obvious that God was favoring Isaac. He wanted a peace treaty with him. Isaac made the treaty and settled in Beersheba.

Esau married two women, who were both Canaanites. Verse 26:35 says, "They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah." The tension in the household was increasing.

## **1.10 Jacob**

At this point, the focus of Genesis shifts to the life of Jacob. Isaac is still alive, but Jacob becomes the main character.

### **1.10.1 Jacob Steals Esau's Blessing**

Genesis 27:1-28:9

The story in Genesis 27 is well known. Isaac is old in years and his vision is dim. He perceives that he could die at any time, and wants to make sure he has passed along the blessing to his son before he dies. What exactly is a blessing?

The concept of a blessing is actually somewhat nebulous. It has different meanings when used in different contexts. When a man blesses God, it means to offer praise or worship or adoration or thanks. It means to celebrate the worthiness and the greatness of God. It can also have a similar meaning when a man of lesser stature (such as a servant) blesses a man of greater stature (such as a master or a king).

When God blesses man, it carries a connotation of bestowing grace, prosperity, long life, spiritual power, or some sort of other mercy or favor. Again, the same sort of connotation can be carried when a person of greater stature (such as a master or a king) blesses a person of lesser stature (such as a servant).

Man or God can bless inanimate objects. We see in Scripture that God blesses the Sabbath. It is common for people to bless food. When this sort of blessing is given, it is calling upon God to use the object to the benefit of those who partake of it. God blesses the Sabbath by benefiting spiritually and physically those who observe the Sabbath. God blesses food by using it to nourish and build up people's bodies.

When a person blesses another person who is his peer, this can mean several things. It can be calling upon God to bestow favor on the person, e.g. "May God bless you and keep you." In this context, a blessing is an intercessory prayer. It can also be a direct gift from the speaker to the recipient by doing or saying something that edifies the hearer in some way – touches him, gives him confidence, helps him sort out a problem or receive new direction, etc. This is what is meant by comments such as "That sermon really blessed me."

The concept of a blessing takes on a special meaning when it is given from a parent to a child. Parents have the unique ability to relate to their children in almost every way mentioned above. A parent can relate to a child as a person of greater stature to a person of lesser stature, at times as a peer to a peer, or even at times as a person of lesser stature to a person of greater stature (yes, our children do some things better than we do and we should praise them for it and build up that part of them). Parents bless their children by offering them praise and adoration and giving them a sense of worth. Parents can bless their children by bestowing grace and mercy and favor upon them. Parents bless their children by interceding for them. They bless their children by touching them, giving them confidence, helping them sort out their problems, and giving them direction.

Parents should bless their children regularly by loving them both physically (people never outgrow the need for a hug or a kiss) and verbally (people also never outgrow the need to hear the words "I love you"). They should bless them by treating them like people of great value, making them believe in themselves and their strengths, and making sure they know that they have someone "in their corner." In Isaac's case, however, he had another type of blessing to pass on to one of his sons. Isaac had received a special blessing because he was the recipient of the promises that God made to Abraham. 26:4 says that God told Isaac, "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed." Isaac knew that this special promise – this blessing – was to be passed on to one of his sons.

So this sets the stage for chapter 27. We also learned in Genesis 25:28 that Isaac loved Esau more but Rebekah loved Jacob more. The verse even tells us why. Esau was a hunter and Isaac liked to eat. He liked the wild game that Esau brought him and for this reason Esau was his favorite son. He ignored the fact that Esau had been irresponsible in marrying not one but two Canaanite women. He ignored the fact that Esau had traded his birthright (which is distinct from the blessing) for a pot of stew. He also ignored the fact that before the twins were born (Genesis 25:23) God had told Rebekah that "the older will serve the younger." It is safe to assume that Rebekah had shared that with Isaac. In spite of all of this, Isaac was prepared to pass on the special blessing – the one that carried with it the promises made to Abraham – to Esau.

Isaac told Esau to go out and kill some wild game and come back and fix him a nice meal, and then he would pass along the blessing to him. Esau was quite excited at this prospect and set out to do just that. Isaac was old and frail and did not see very well. He waited for Esau to come back and fill his tummy.

Rebekah overheard this and decided to take matters into her own hands. Remember that Jacob was her favorite. She also had been the one to receive the word from God directly about the older serving the younger. So she ran and found Jacob and they devised a plot. He killed one of the animals from their livestock and brought it to her and they fixed a meal like Isaac wanted. She dressed up Jacob in Esau's clothes so he would feel and smell like Esau. She had Jacob go tell Isaac that he was Esau, that he had the meal for him, and that he was ready to receive the blessing. Isaac thought it sounded like Jacob so he called him over and hugged and kissed him (remember that part of the blessing is physical). He was satisfied that it was Esau because it felt and smelled like Esau. Thus he gave the blessing. In 27:27-29 he said,

Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.  
May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness – an abundance of grain and new wine.  
May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you.  
Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.  
May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.

Even though he thought he was talking to Esau, Isaac had just given a prophetic utterance over Jacob making him lord over his brother and making him the recipient of the promise given to Abraham.

Right after Jacob left, Esau came into the room with his food, ready to claim his blessing. Isaac then realized that he had been tricked. Esau realized that he had been robbed. He realized also, however, that whatever blessing Isaac had given to Jacob could not be retrieved. If it was retrievable it was worthless. Esau pleaded with Isaac to come up with some sort of blessing for him. There was not much left to give! In verses 27:39-40, Isaac said,

Your dwelling will be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above.  
You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother.  
But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck.

This was not exactly what Esau had longed to hear all these years, but it was just as significant of a prophetic utterance as what Jacob had heard.

After that, Esau was mad and wanted to kill Jacob. Jacob and Rebekah both knew that Jacob was not particularly safe hanging around the house. So again Rebekah got into the act. She told Isaac that she was fed up with living with the Hittite wives of Esau. She would not be able to stand it if Jacob, too, married one of the local girls. She told Isaac that she wanted Jacob to go back to the land of their fathers and find a wife from their own people. Isaac called Jacob and said (28:1-4)

Do not marry a Canaanite woman. Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham.

Isaac is freely and knowingly giving Jacob the full blessing now. Jacob leaves. In a sad footnote, Esau hears that Jacob is leaving and the reason why. He marries a third wife, Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, in a desperate attempt to please his parents by taking a wife who is one of their people (she was a cousin). The unchosen son of Isaac married the daughter of the unchosen son of Abraham. Esau was a man who wanted so badly to feel the unconditional love and acceptance of his parents – probably his mother in particular. He would probably never have any peace about this.

In fact, the whole family is sad. Isaac could not see that God had clearly chosen Jacob. Rebekah and Jacob did not trust God to carry out his will in his own way and thus took matters into their own hands, resorting to trickery and deceit to bring about something that God would have made happen anyway. The result of this is that Jacob had to flee and he and Rebekah, his mother, never saw each other again. This family was torn apart by favoritism, trickery, and deceit. It was destroyed by the simple failure of parents to bestow unconditionally and regularly "normal" parental blessings on their children. They failed to raise them both to feel valued and to understand their strengths and help them plan for their futures – in God's will. The legacy was one nation (Israel) which was chosen to carry out God's plan and another nation (Edom – the Edomites are the descendants of Esau) which would forever live in hostility with their brothers.

### 1.10.2 Jacob at Bethel

Genesis 28:10-22

As Jacob was on his way to his uncle's land, he came to a certain place one night and spent the night there. During the night, he had a dream with angels ascending and descending to and from heaven on a stairway. God appeared and said (28:13-15),

I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

The same promise that God had given to Abraham and Isaac he now gives to Jacob. Jacob woke up and knew that he was in a holy presence. He named the site "Bethel," which literally means House of God. He had received the blessing from his father Isaac, which was significant to him. However, he would see very little of Isaac the remainder of his life. It was important that he was now receiving the blessing from God himself. Jacob was beginning a new process – that of learning to hear God directly and to follow his voice. It was a lesson that would take him a great deal of time to learn.

### 1.10.3 Jacob Arrives at the Home of Laban

Genesis 29:1-14

Jacob continued on his journey toward Paddan Aram, where his uncle Laban lived. When he got near, he met some shepherds and asked them if they knew Laban. They said that they did. About that time, Laban's daughter Rachel came with her sheep (they were at a well when it happened). Jacob embraced her and told her who he was. She ran and told Laban. Laban came and got him and embraced him and welcomed him as his own flesh and blood.

### 1.10.4 Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

Genesis 29:14-30

Now Jacob was well versed in the art of deception and manipulation, but he met his match in Laban.

When Jacob arrived at Laban's house, he began working for Laban. Laban told him that he should pay him some wage for working and asked what Jacob wanted. Jacob had already fallen in love with Rachel and Rachel is what Jacob wanted.

In that day, when a man wanted to marry a woman, he would normally enter into a marriage covenant prior to entering into the marriage. As part of the covenant, he would pay the father of the bride some sort of price for receiving the bride. This may sound sort of crass, but it was an economic reality of the time. If a man had a son, then when that son reached a certain age, he could begin helping his father to provide a living for the family. Vocational work in those days was typically very physical in nature and women did not normally participate. (We do see an exception here because the text says that Rachel helped to tend the sheep). A daughter was another mouth to feed rather than being another back to help provide food. Thus when a woman married, her husband would pay a "bride price" to the father of the bride, sort of as compensation

for the investment he had made in the daughter. Jacob told Laban that he would work for him for seven years as the bride price for Rachel.

Laban agreed to this arrangement. At least he told Jacob that he did. Laban had a bit of a problem on his hands, however. Rachel had an older sister named Leah. Leah was not as attractive as Rachel. Nobody was beating down the door to pay the bride price for her. If the younger sister married prior to the older sister, then the older sister was going to be almost like "damaged goods" which would be hard to "unload." Perhaps at the time Laban made the agreement with Jacob he expected that he would be able to find a husband for Leah before Rachel's wedding. But when the seven years were up, Leah was still unmarried.

When it came time for Jacob's and Rachel's wedding, Laban threw a big feast. When it came time for Jacob and his veiled bride to go off into the bridal chamber, Laban substituted Leah for Rachel. Not having been in the room when this transpired, I am not positive how the next part happened, but only after the time the marriage was consummated did Jacob realize that he had just slept with Leah rather than Rachel. Jacob was not thrilled. Rachel was bound to be quite upset by the whole situation. And for that matter, Leah cannot have felt very special when Jacob found out that he had just spent the night with her and then threw a fit about it.

Anyway, Jacob confronted Laban. Laban said that it was contrary to custom to let the younger sister marry before the older sister (you'd think he might have mentioned that tiny detail before the wedding). He said to spend the week with Leah (the couple normally spent a week in private after the wedding) and then he would give him Rachel in return for another seven year's work. Jacob did not really have much choice in the matter. He loved Rachel and wanted her.

The honeymoon week of Jacob and Leah cannot have been the most romantic of events. She probably sat around feeling unloved and he probably sat around talking about Rachel. Anyway, they stuck out the week together and then Jacob moved into his wedding week with Rachel. Then he worked for seven more years for Laban to pay the bride price (again) for Rachel.

### 1.10.5 The Children of Jacob

Genesis 29:31-30:24

God compensated Leah for the fact that she was unloved. Jacob did not totally neglect her sexually and she began having children, while Rachel was barren. She had a son and named him Reuben. She had a second son and named him Simeon. She had a third son and named him Levi. She had a fourth son and named him Judah.

Having children was very important to women at that time – particularly having sons. Rachel was feeling bad because she was not having any children. She took the "Sarah" approach and gave Jacob her concubine, Bilhah. Jacob slept with her and she had a son and Rachel named him Dan. Bilhah had a second son and Rachel named him Naphtali.

Two could play at this game. Leah was not having any more children at the time so she gave Jacob her concubine, Zilpah. Zilpah had a son and Leah named him Gad. Zilpah then had another son and Leah named him Asher.

Verses 30:14-16 give us an interesting glimpse into the interactions of the household of Jacob.

During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?"

"Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes."

So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night.

Mandrake plants were thought to induce fertility. Rachel really wanted to conceive. But the interchange between Leah and Rachel sounds like two cats fighting. It also seems that Rachel controlled the sleeping arrangements. I cannot imagine how Jacob must have felt when he found out he had been "hired" by Leah to sleep with her that night. It is also apparent that Leah views Rachel as a home wrecker ("you took away my husband"). Thanks, Laban.

When Jacob slept with Leah that night, she got pregnant again and had a son and named him Issachar. She conceived again and had a son named Zebulun. She also conceived one last time and had a daughter named Dinah.

Rachel had been praying that she could have a child and God finally answered her prayer. She had a son and named him Joseph.

Rachel would later have a last son (the twelfth son, Benjamin) but that takes place a bit later in the story.

### 1.10.6 The Flocks of Jacob Increase

Genesis 30:25-43

We do not know exactly how long it took for the children above to be born, but we can assume it took longer than the seven years that Jacob had to work to pay the bride price for Rachel. At this point in the story, Jacob wanted to go back to his homeland and take his family with him. Laban wanted him to stay. Laban had figured out that God bestowed a great deal of grace on Jacob because Laban's flocks had increased greatly under Jacob's care. He told Jacob to name his price for staying.

Jacob explained to Laban that it was time for him to start worrying about his own prosperity rather than just Laban's. He said that he would continue working for Laban if Laban would begin giving Jacob all of the speckled, spotted, and dark-colored sheep and goats. Laban agreed, but secretly went through the flocks and took out all of the spotted, speckled, and dark-colored sheep and goats and sent them off with his sons so that Jacob could not have them.

The section starting in 30:37 is a bit confusing.

Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or specked or spotted. Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals. Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches, but if the animals were weak, he would not

place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys.

What in the world is this saying? There was a superstition that if animals mated in front of striped branches, they would bear striped offspring. Jacob was trying to get the strongest of animals to mate in this manner so that the strongest offspring born into Laban's flocks would be striped or speckled and thus would become Jacob's. In fact, the strongest offspring born in the flocks did come out striped and speckled, but it was because God provided it and not because of Jacob's branches. Again, Jacob was trying to manipulate his way into something that God wanted to give him anyway. Dependence on God was something he still had to learn. But the fact is that he grew quite wealthy during this time.

### 1.10.7 Jacob Flees from Laban

Genesis 31

The time finally came when Jacob began to feel unwelcome in Laban's home. Laban had sons who are not specifically named, but those sons began to grumble that Jacob was taking all of the wealth from Laban and thus he was taking their inheritance. Laban's attitude towards Jacob seemed to change as well. Furthermore, God spoke to Jacob and told him that it was time to go back to the home of his father, Isaac. Jacob discussed this with Rachel and Leah and they agreed to go.

Jacob feared that Laban would not let him leave in peace and might take his daughters and grandchildren as well as the flocks that Jacob had earned from Laban. Thus Jacob loaded his wives and servants and children onto camels and they departed in secret. Before leaving, Rachel stole her father's household gods and took them with her.

Now what is this all about? Here is the favorite wife of the chosen one of God having household gods in her possession. Yes, that is what it said. Rachel and Leah had grown up in Laban's home. Laban lived in a polytheistic society and obviously embraced that concept himself. He kept idols – or household gods – in his home. These gods were thought to give protection to the home. We are not exactly sure what Rachel's motivation in taking them was. She may have believed that they would give her home the same protection that Laban thought they gave his. It is also likely that she feared that Laban would pursue them (them being Jacob and the people leaving with him) and would try to do them some sort of harm. She may have believed that having Laban's gods in her possession would give her an advantage over him – that in taking his protection she took away his ability to do harm to her and her family. We see this same sort of thing in the time of Samuel (see 1 Samuel Chapter 4). The Israelites were engaged in battle with the Philistines. The Ark of the Covenant was brought into the Israeli camp. The Israelites felt assured of victory and the Philistines felt sure they would be defeated because a god was in the camp of their enemies.

The people of Rachel's time (pre Mt. Sinai) did not really understand the Omnipresent and Omnipotent God and they did not understand the impotent gods. As a result, Laban had household idols and Rachel stole them before they left.

Three days after Jacob and his family had departed, Laban figured out that they had gone. He pursued them. In his pursuit, God appeared to Laban and told him to leave Jacob alone. Laban caught up with Jacob and told him that he should not have left like he did. Laban said that he had the power to do harm to Jacob but would not do so because God told him not to. He said it was not fair to leave without letting Laban say good-bye to his daughters and grandchildren. He also accused Jacob of stealing his household gods.

Jacob took offense at that and said that if anyone in his party had stolen anything from Laban that they should be killed. He allowed Laban to search the tents. He searched Jacob's tent and found nothing. He searched Leah's tent and found nothing. He searched Zilpah's and Bilhah's tents and found nothing. Rachel, in the mean time, was sweating. She hid the gods in her camel's saddlebag and sat on the bag. When her father came into her tent, she told him to search it but excused herself for not being able to stand because (she told him) she was having her period. She lied. (She also stole.) But Laban did not find his gods.

Then Jacob unloaded a bit of his frustration on Laban. We read in 31:38-42.

I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times. If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.

So, life at uncle-and-father-in-law Laban's house was not like a weekend at the Holiday Inn. There was obviously a great deal of hard feelings and mistrust between the two men. They decided to establish a covenant – a sort of peace treaty – between the two of them.

There is a line from this covenant that often gets lifted out of context and put on greeting cards and jewelry: "May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other." Taken out of context, it sounds like it is saying "May God keep us safe while we are apart and bring us back together quickly." In fact, what Laban was saying was "We do not trust each other. We also probably will never see each other again. We are entering into a covenant. If you violate your part of it, may God get you for it and if I violate my part of it, may God get me for it." There was nothing particularly loving or nostalgic about the words. The complete covenant is in Genesis 31:49-53.

"May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me."

Laban also said to Jacob, "Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. This heap is a witness and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me. May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.

So Jacob and Laban agreed to the terms of this covenant. Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren good-bye – forever – and went home. Jacob turned his face to head towards home and to face something that had probably given him knots in his stomach for years – Esau. When he left home, he had just tricked Esau out of his blessing and Esau was out to kill him. What kind of a welcome would await him now?

### 1.10.8 Preparing to Meet Esau

Genesis 32:1-21

Jacob sent messengers ahead to let Esau know that he was coming and to try to get some sort of idea about what sort of reception he would get. The messengers returned with news that Esau was coming and 400 men with him. This did not sound like good news to Jacob. He could only figure that Esau was bringing an army – not a greeting party. So Jacob prayed. He reminded God that he had told him to return to the land of his father. He reminded him that he had promised to bless Jacob and make his descendants numerous.

He separated from his flocks a large quantity of goats, sheep, camels, and cattle and sent them ahead as gifts to Esau, hoping to buy his favor or at least placate his anger. Jacob was really worried.

### 1.10.9 Jacob Wrestles with God

Genesis 32:22-32

When night came, they were at a river. Jacob put his wives, children, possessions, and servants across the river and he remained behind for the night, probably to sort things out in his own mind. In 32:24-30 we read,

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man asked, him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called this place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

The text indicates that this night, Jacob physically wrestled with God incarnate. For him that night, God became a physical obstacle that he had to overcome before crossing that river and continuing on his journey home. God often carries out in the physical what is actually taking place in the spiritual realm. The fact is that Jacob did wrestle with God that night in a spiritual sense.

Jacob had just come from a long, emotionally tiring and trying experience with Laban. He had felt what it was like to be the recipient of trickery and deceit – the very things upon which he had depended in his own life to get him ahead. He was facing an emotional crisis in the coming of Esau – thus far the biggest victim of his deceit. His life was coming to a spiritual crisis point and this was his night to face it. And so he had to wrestle with his very nature. And God was willing

to spar with him that night. Obviously the God who created the universe could rip Jacob to shreds if he wanted to, but this was not really a physical contest. This was the night when Jacob was being tested to see whether or not he could come to grips with who he was. It was his night to finally answer the question of whether he would let God be God and give him the freedom to fulfill his promises in his own time through his own means, or would Jacob continue to manipulate his way through the world. Just as is true with every one of us, God had to confront Jacob with his own sin nature. Jacob could stubbornly hold on to it or he could submit it to the refiner's fire. And just as is too often true with each of us, this happened at a great crisis point in his life.

But Jacob prevailed. In that night, God changed his name from "Jacob" which literally means "He Grabs," or "He Deceives," to "Israel," which means "He struggles with God." That is probably best interpreted as "He struggles with God, i.e. as a partner" as opposed to "He struggles against God." God said that Jacob had struggled with men and with God and had overcome. This was a night of great victory for Jacob and for all of mankind, because this particular son of promise had passed the test.

### 1.10.10 Jacob Meets Esau

Genesis 33

The next day, Jacob saw Esau and his men coming. Jacob was still concerned that Esau meant harm. He decided to line up the members of his family in a strategic position so that if some of them got killed, perhaps others would survive. He put the concubines and their children first, followed by Leah and her children, followed by Rachel and Joseph. Jacob was already playing favorites. You would think that after growing up in a house that played favorites with the children, he would know better.

Jacob ran ahead of them all and met Esau first. When they met, there was no bitterness and no anger. They hugged and wept. Esau was genuinely happy to see Jacob. He was happy to meet his family. He tried to refuse the gifts (animals) that Jacob had sent ahead, saying that he already had plenty, but Jacob insisted that he keep them. Esau encouraged Jacob to return home with him. Instead, Jacob went to the town of Shechem and settled there.

### 1.10.11 Dinah and the Shechemites

Genesis 34

Shechem was probably a fairly small town. When Jacob showed up there with his two wives and two maidservants and eleven sons and one daughter and his mass of servants and livestock, it would have been like a movie star moving to Mayberry. It would have been the constant topic of conversation at Floyd's barbershop and Gomer's gas station. Aunt Bee and the town council would have thrown them a big welcome party.

Well, Jacob and his family were sure to have drawn some attention when they arrived. Dinah, the daughter of Leah, caught the eye of one of the young men in the town, who found her attractive. He raped her. He did want her, however, and offered to pay whatever bride price Jacob wanted so that he could marry her.

Jacob and his sons did not take kindly to the fact that their daughter/sister had been raped. It is curious that Jacob himself did little more than get mad. One wonders what he would have done if Dinah had been Rachel's daughter. Dinah's brothers came up with a scheme to avenge the violation. They told the man that they could not allow him to marry Dinah because he was not

circumcised. In fact, if the people of Shechem wanted to intermarry with Jacob's family, all the men in the town would have to be circumcised.

The young man talked to the other men in the town. Surely it would be a good thing if they could begin intermarrying with this family. They were the new rich and glamorous big shots in the town. Making all the men get circumcised would be a small price to pay for being able to embrace Jacob and his family and all of their wealth. So they all got circumcised.

Simeon and Levi, two of Dinah's full brothers, waited a couple of days until the wounds from the circumcision would have been at a very painful stage. Then they invaded the town and killed all of the men, none of whom could fight. They plundered the town and took all of their possessions, including the women and children (who were basically considered possessions).

When it was done, Jacob was quite upset with his sons for what they had done. Not only was it very wrong, but it put them in a position of being a target of violence by other Canaanite groups, who may have sought vengeance for what happened at Shechem.

### 1.10.12 Jacob Returns to Bethel

Genesis 35:1-15

It was not particularly safe for Jacob to remain around Shechem at this time. God told him to go back to Bethel. When he was originally fleeing from Esau, this is the place where Jacob had spent the night and God had confirmed to him that he would receive the promises made to Abraham and Isaac. So they went back to Bethel. Before leaving, Jacob made the members of his household (which included his wives and children and servants) get rid of any household idols that they may still have and he buried them in Shechem. Verse 35:5 says that God put a terror in the surrounding peoples so that nobody tried to bother them as they left the area.

At Bethel, God appeared to Jacob once again. In verses 35:10-12 we read,

God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel.

And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you."

Once again, the promise was confirmed.

### 1.10.13 The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

Genesis 35:16-29

They continued on from Bethel and headed towards Ephrath (Bethlehem). While there, Rachel, who was pregnant, went into labor. She died in childbirth and gave birth to Benjamin, the father of the twelfth tribe of Israel. Rachel was buried at Bethlehem (and her tomb is there today).

After the death of Rachel, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, slept with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah (who had been Rachel's maidservant, the mother of Dan and Naphtali). Everyone knew about it. This may have been more than a mere moral indiscretion. It is likely that Reuben was trying to assume the role of family patriarch before his time. It was not an uncommon practice for a son

to try to take over the family before the father's death by sleeping with one of his father's concubines. Note that Jacob now has a serious offense against his three eldest sons, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, which is perhaps the reason why Christ was born from the tribe of the fourth son, Judah.

After that, Jacob returned to the home of Isaac, who was still living. Shortly after that, Isaac died at the age of 180. Jacob and Esau buried him together.

## 1.10.14 The Legacy of Esau

### Genesis 36

Chapter 36 of Genesis deals with the descendants of Esau. Note that verse 2 names his wives differently than 26:34 and 28:9. There are several possible explanations for this. They may have gone by more than one name. It is also possible that Esau had more wives than are mentioned in either place. Perhaps the wives mentioned in chapters 26 and 28 bore him no children. The focus of chapter 36 is on Esau's descendants, so if he had wives that bore him no children, they might not be mentioned in this chapter.

The chapter seems to be primarily for historical reference. A certain amount of useful background information appears in verses 6-8.

Esau took his wives and sons and daughters and all the members of his household, as well as his livestock and all his other animals and all the goods he had acquired in Canaan, and moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob. Their possessions were too great for them to remain together, the land where they were staying could not support them both because of their livestock. So Esau (that is, Edom) settled in the hill country of Seir.

Apparently for at least some period of time after Isaac's death, Jacob and Esau lived in proximity to one another. Between them there was a great amount of wealth, which in those days was probably measured by how much livestock one had. It took a fair amount of land to support the livestock that they had between them. It became obvious that they needed to put some distance between them so that there would be enough for their animals to eat. One of them had to leave and it was Esau that left. This is in line with the promise that Jacob would be the one to inherit the Promised Land. Did Esau move on in fulfillment of that? Yes. Did he realize that this was what he was doing and do it willingly? We are not sure. He may have just thought the grass was greener over in Seir and moved on. Whatever the reason, Esau and his clan moved to Seir, which is south of Canaan. They became known as the Edomites. As the latter half of the chapter points out, kings descended from Esau, and the Edomites had a monarchy long before the Israelites ever thought about it.

## 1.11 Joseph

The focus of the narrative now shifts primarily to the life of Joseph. Jacob is still alive and Joseph is his favorite son. This causes havoc in his household as he so openly showed favoritism towards Joseph.

### 1.11.1 The Coat of Many Colors and Joseph's Dreams

Genesis 37:1-11

The first part of Chapter 37 paints a picture of a somewhat bratty Joseph. The first thing that we learn about him is that he is a tattletale on his brothers. The second thing we learn is that Jacob made no bones about treating Joseph as his favorite, as symbolized by giving him the specially made multicolored coat. This was obviously a significant garment, indicative of Jacob's favor of Joseph. His brothers were bound to be jealous.

Then Joseph had a dream that he and his brothers were binding sheaves of grain in the field. Suddenly his sheaf stood up and all the other ones bowed down to it. Maybe it was okay for him to have this dream, but he may have lacked a certain amount of discretion in telling it to his brothers. They took great offense at it. Then he had another dream where the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to him. Again he told them the dream. This time Jacob rebuked him, asking Joseph if he expected his mother and father and brothers to bow to him. Still Jacob remembered the event, having a bit more experience with divine revelation than the others.

These dreams were prophetic. There would come a time when these people would bow before Joseph. But for now, it set up a great deal of jealousy and discontent in the home.

### 1.11.2 Joseph is Sold Into Slavery By His Brothers

Genesis 37:12-36

One day Joseph's older brothers were off tending the flocks somewhere. They had not been home in several days and Jacob wanted to know how they were doing. He asked Joseph to go find his brothers and bring back a report of their status. So Joseph went out to find his brothers.

His brothers saw him coming and said, "Here comes the dreamer." They had a great deal of hatred towards him and figured this was their chance to get him. Their first inclination was to kill him when he arrived. Reuben, the eldest, wanted to avoid bloodshed. He talked his brothers into simply putting Joseph into a cistern. His plan was to rescue Joseph later and send him home. So the brothers put Joseph into a cistern.

A bit of time passed. Joseph was in the cistern. Reuben was away from the group, probably tending to the animals. Then a group of Ishmaelite traders came by. Judah got an idea and talked his brothers into selling Joseph to these traders as a slave. They would gain nothing by shedding his blood (after all, he was family). So they did that. Joseph was sold into slavery.

When Reuben came back and found out what had happened, he was quite upset. How were they going to explain this to Jacob? They got an idea. They took Joseph's coat of many colors and smeared it with animal blood. Then they took it back to Jacob and said, "Does this look familiar?" Jacob assumed that Joseph had been attacked and killed. He went into a deep state of grief for his favorite son, whom he believed to be dead.

### 1.11.3 The Judah and Tamar Interlude

Genesis 38

The story has headed into the life of Joseph at this point, but chapter 38 stops and tells a story about Judah. If you did not know how it all came out, when you got to the end of Genesis you would suspect that the promise of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob would probably be carried on

through the line of Joseph, since he emerges as the star of the rest of the book. In fact, the promise was carried forth in Judah, the one who sold Joseph into slavery. God chooses whom he pleases.

Judah married a Canaanite woman named Hirah. That alone could have been a bit of a problem since the Israelites never did mix very well with the Canaanites. Through this woman, Judah had three sons: Er, Onan, and a much younger son named Shelah.

Er married a woman named Tamar. Er was a wicked man and the Lord took his life because of his wickedness. In that time, it was customary that if a man died leaving a widow but no heir, the brother of the deceased man would marry the widow and impregnate her to produce an heir for his brother. Why is that?

It all goes back to the concept of the birthright (the thing that Jacob manipulated out of Esau). The firstborn son got a double share of the inheritance. He also got the responsibility of taking care of any young sons in the family, unmarried sisters, and the widow if she was still living. The other brothers got a share and went out and started their own family lines. Women did not get a share of the inheritance. In the case of Tamar, when Er died, along with him went all visible means of support. So the custom was that the next surviving brother (in this case, Onan) should marry and impregnate the widow. The child (hopefully a son) that would be produced would be considered to be the heir of the dead brother (in this case, Er). Thus this child would have legal rights to the dead brother's portion of the inheritance, the family line would be continued, and the widow (Tamar) would have someone to support her.

This arrangement posed a problem to the surviving brother if he were greedy. If his brother had no heir, then he would become the oldest brother and thus would have the birthright and would get the double share of the estate. By giving Tamar a son, he would greatly decrease his own inheritance. So we see in the chapter that Onan was willing to take advantage of Tamar sexually, but when it came to impregnating her, (v. 9) "he spilled his seed on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother." God was angry with him for his wickedness and rebellion and thus he died too.

This left Shelah, who was too young at the time to take over for his two brothers. Judah promised Tamar that when Shelah was old enough, he would have Shelah impregnate Tamar to carry on the family line.

Time passed. Shelah grew up. Judah did not live up to his promise. Tamar decided to take matters into her own hands. One day when she discovered that Judah was in the area, she dressed up as a temple prostitute and seduced Judah (her face would have been covered). He wanted to sleep with her so she asked him what he would pay her to sleep with her. He promised to bring her a goat. She made him leave his seal, its cord, and his staff in pledge. He slept with her and left. He came back some time later with the goat, hoping to reclaim his seal, cord, and staff. He could not find this prostitute anywhere. So he forgot about it.

Several months later he heard that Tamar was pregnant. He accused her of prostitution and said that she should be put to death. She said that she had been impregnated by the man that owned these – and then produced the seal, the cord, and the staff. Judah realized what had happened and realized that he had been at fault for not giving her Shelah.

She gave birth to twins. The birth was a bit like that of Esau and Jacob. One baby put his hand out first and the midwife tied a scarlet cord around it to mark it as the firstborn. But the hand was withdrawn back into the womb and then the other baby was born. That baby was named Perez, which means "breaking out." The first baby was then born and was named Zerah, which can mean "scarlet" or "brightness." Once again, the one who was technically the firstborn (Zerah did

emerge first) was not the one that God chose to carry on his promise. Perez became the ancestor of David and of Christ.

#### 1.11.4 Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

Genesis 39

Back to Joseph . After he was taken to Egypt, he was bought by Potiphar, who was a high-ranking Egyptian official – the captain of the guard. It did not take Potiphar too long to realize that Joseph had the favor of some god upon him (Potiphar was probably polytheistic so he would not have recognized the favor of God per se) because everything that Joseph did prospered. It did not take too long before Joseph was the chief servant and basically in charge of everything in Potiphar's house. Potiphar trusted him with everything in the house.

Potiphar's wife also found Joseph to be an attractive addition to the household. Apparently he was strong and handsome. She found him to be very appealing. A number of times she tried to get him into bed with her but he refused. He tried to avoid her whenever he could because he knew she was trouble.

The day finally came when Joseph found himself alone in the house with her. No other servants were around. She grabbed him and said, "Come to bed with me." He simply ran from the situation, leaving his cloak behind in the process. What exactly prompted her next move I am not sure. Apparently she had been pressuring him like this for some time and he had been refusing, so the rejection was not new to her. Maybe she reached the point where she felt like it was a lost cause with him and felt like getting back at him. Maybe she felt like she had finally crossed some threshold where Joseph may try to do something about the situation (e.g. tell somebody) so she felt she had to get rid of him. For whatever reason, she made up a story, telling everyone that Joseph had come to try to take advantage of her, and that she had screamed and he had fled, leaving behind his cloak. When Potiphar heard the report, he had Joseph thrown into prison.

Joseph had been righteous in his dealings and God was with him through the whole thing. God went with him to prison and continued to bestow great favor on him there. The wardens recognized that same favor in Joseph that Potiphar had seen in him, and it was not long before they were treating him well and putting him in charge of the other prisoners. Joseph was still in prison and not a free man, but he had it about as good as it was going to get in that place.

#### 1.11.5 The Cupbearer and the Baker

Genesis 40

At some point, the Pharaoh got mad at his chief cupbearer and his chief baker and threw them into jail. These were two very trusted and important servants, because they controlled the food that went into Pharaoh's mouth. It was up to them to make sure the Pharaoh was not poisoned, and they did this by putting their own lives between the Pharaoh and his food (i.e. the cupbearer would typically taste any wine before it was served to the king). Why he got mad at them we do not know. It is reasonable to assume that he got sick from something he ate and assumed that one of them must have been responsible for it. That, however, is purely conjecture. We do not know why they were thrown in prison.

One night while they were there, each had a dream. Each was perplexed by it the next day. Joseph recognized that these two were agitated or distracted and he asked them what was

wrong. They said that they had dreamed the night before and did not know what the dreams meant. Joseph said that the interpretation of dreams belongs to God and offered to listen.

The cupbearer said that he saw a vine with three branches. The branches produced grapes and they ripened. The cupbearer took the king's cup and squeezed the grapes into the cup and presented the cup to the Pharaoh.

Joseph said that the three branches represented three days. Within three days the Pharaoh would restore the cupbearer to his position. Joseph asked that when he was restored he would remember Joseph to the king, explaining the circumstances under which he had arrived in prison and his desire to be free.

The baker heard that Joseph was passing out good news and wanted to get in on it. He explained his dream to Joseph as well. He had dreamed that there were three baskets of bread on his head. The top basket had baked goods for Pharaoh, but birds were eating out of the baskets. Joseph said that this meant that within three days Pharaoh would have him hanged and the birds would eat his flesh.

Three days later was the Pharaoh's birthday. He held a big party. He had the cupbearer and the baker (who was probably a bit nervous) brought to the gathering. He restored the cupbearer to his position and had the baker hanged. The birds ate his flesh.

The cupbearer forgot to tell Pharaoh about Joseph.

### 1.11.6 Pharaoh's Dreams

Genesis 41

About two years later, Pharaoh had some dreams of his own. One night he dreamed that there were seven very plump and healthy cows grazing along the Nile. Then seven very ugly and scrawny cows came up out of the Nile and devoured the seven fat cows. He woke up puzzled by this, but went back to sleep. Then he dreamed that he saw seven heads of very healthy and good grain growing on a single stalk. Seven other heads of grain then sprouted – thin and scorched heads. The thin heads swallowed up the seven healthy heads of wheat. Pharaoh woke up again, bothered.

The next day he called together all of his wise men and magicians and tried to get them to explain the meaning of the dreams. None of them could. The cupbearer heard what was going on. He remembered Joseph, feeling guilty for never having brought him to the attention of the Pharaoh. He told Pharaoh about the time he had been in prison and that Joseph had interpreted the dreams for him and the baker. Pharaoh summoned Joseph. He came from the prison, showered and shaved, and came before Pharaoh. Pharaoh asked him if he could interpret dreams and again Joseph gave the right answer – no, but the God that I serve can.

Pharaoh explained his dreams. Joseph told him that the two dreams were basically the same. The seven good cows and the seven good heads of grain represented seven years of abundance that would take place in Egypt. The seven lean cows and seven scrawny heads of grain represented seven years of famine that would follow the seven years of prosperity. The reason that Pharaoh had dreamed this twice is that God wanted to doubly assure Pharaoh that this was going to happen and that it would happen soon.

Joseph recommended that Pharaoh choose someone wise to oversee the handling of the years of abundance – putting food into reserves – so that there would be food available during the years of famine. Pharaoh figured that there could be nobody better for the job than Joseph

himself. Joseph was made second in command in Egypt with authority over everyone but Pharaoh. During the times of abundance, he gathered and stored more grain than could be measured. When the years of famine did finally come, there was food available. They sold the food to those who needed it.

During this time, Joseph married Asenath, daughter of Potiphara, who was an Egyptian priest (of some pagan god no doubt). She bore him two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

The famine that hit was not localized to Egypt. Surrounding nations were affected as well. People from neighboring countries came to Egypt – to Joseph – to buy food.

God had a plan.

### 1.11.7 Joseph's Brothers Come to Egypt

Genesis 42

The famine was in Canaan as well. Jacob and his family did not have enough to eat. Jacob heard that there was food for sale in Egypt, so he sent his 10 eldest sons to go and buy some grain. He kept Benjamin with him. Benjamin was quite a bit younger than the other brothers, but he was also the favorite son now that Joseph was gone.

The ten brothers took money and headed to Egypt. The person in Egypt who sold grain was Joseph, the governor of the land. So the day came when the ten brothers found themselves before Joseph, bowing. They did not recognize him but he recognized them immediately and remembered his dream. Furthermore, Joseph spoke through an interpreter, so they had no idea that he knew who they were or what they were saying.

They told him they wanted to buy food. He asked them where they came from and they told him Canaan. He said that they were lying about wanting food and that they were spies, trying to find a weakness in Egypt's defenses so they could attack. They tried to reassure him that they really only wanted to buy food. They explained that they were all sons of one man. There were originally twelve brothers. One is at home with his father. One other "is no more." Of course, Joseph knew all of this, but he was trying to get a feel for whether or not his brothers had changed. He had them all thrown in prison for being spies and kept them there for three days. After that time, he went to them and said that he was a God-fearing man and would make them a deal. One of the brothers had to remain in prison. The others could take food back to their starving family. Before the other brother could be released or before they could buy more food, they had to return with the eleventh brother (Benjamin) in order to prove that their story was true. The brothers began to talk among themselves, not knowing that Joseph could understand everything they said. They said (42:21-22)

"Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us."

Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood."

When Joseph heard this, he turned away from them and wept. He had Simeon bound and put back in prison. Then he had his servants fill their sacks with grain and put their money back in their bags. They were sent on their way.

On the way back, one brother opened his bag to get grain for the animals and found his money in the bag. He was worried. Would they be accused of stealing when they returned to Egypt?

They got home and told Jacob all that had happened. When they unloaded the rest of the sacks of grain, they found the rest of their money. This did not seem good to them. Jacob was really upset. He wanted to know why they had to tell the Egyptian man about Benjamin. Why couldn't they have left well enough alone? He had no intention of letting Benjamin return to Egypt with them. He had lost Joseph and now Simeon and he was not about to lose Benjamin as well.

### 1.11.8 The Brothers Return to Egypt

Genesis 43

Eventually the food ran out. They were going to have to go back to Egypt. Jacob tried to talk them into going without Benjamin, but they insisted that Benjamin go along. Judah personally guaranteed his safety.

They took with them twice the amount of silver they would need to buy the grain so that they could pay back the money from the first time. They also took gifts for this Egyptian governor. When they returned, Joseph recognized them again and had them taken to his house. They were not sure why, but he intended to throw a feast for them. They assumed it had something to do with the silver that had been returned to them on their first trip. They told the steward of the house that their silver had been returned to them the previous time and that they were not sure how or why, but that they had brought enough silver this time to pay it back. The steward assured them that their money had been received the first time and that if it had been returned to them then it was a provision from God.

Simeon was returned to them and a feast was prepared. Around mealtime, Joseph came home. He inquired about the health of their aging father, whom they had mentioned on the first trip. Then he was introduced to the eleventh brother that they had brought with them on this trip, Benjamin. Upon seeing Benjamin, his full brother, Joseph began to feel emotional so he went to his private room and wept. Then he came back for the feast. He had the brothers seated at a table in order of their ages and they were extremely surprised that he was able to do that. He had the food served to them and had a "hungry man" sized portion served to Benjamin. They all ate and drank and feasted together.

There is an interesting side comment found in 43:32. "They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians." I will come back to this comment at the end of chapter 45.

### 1.11.9 Joseph's Silver Cup

Genesis 44

Joseph still had one test left for his brothers. He would send them on their journey home the next day. He had their sacks filled with grain and again returned their money. He had his servant put Joseph's silver goblet into the sack of Benjamin. He let the brothers leave and gave them time to travel a short distance. Then he sent his soldiers out to overtake them.

When they got to the brothers, they said, "How could you treat Joseph this way? Why have you returned his good with evil?" They asked, "What do you mean?" The soldiers said, "One of you has stolen Joseph's silver cup."

They denied it, of course. They said that if any of them had stolen the cup that person would be killed and the rest of them would become slaves. The soldiers said that would be unnecessary, but the one who had the cup would become a slave. So they began searching the sacks. Of course, they found it in the sack of Benjamin. Well, the brothers were upset.

They all headed back to Joseph. Joseph acted indignant and told them that Benjamin would have to remain as his slave and that the others could go free. Judah had guaranteed Benjamin's safe return to Jacob. Note that Judah is the one who had sold Joseph into slavery in the first place. Judah explained to Joseph that his father was aging and his life was tied very tightly to Benjamin. He had two sons by his favorite wife and one was now gone. If they returned without Benjamin, the other son by that wife, his father would surely die. Judah pleaded for Benjamin's freedom and offered to stay in his place as Joseph's slave for the rest of his life if he would just let Benjamin return to Jacob.

### 1.11.10 Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers

Genesis 45

Chapter 45 always makes me cry.

Joseph was convinced that his brothers had truly changed. In particular, he could see that Judah, who had once sold his father's favorite son into slavery, now offered himself as a slave in order that his father's favorite son could be free. He was about to explode emotionally. He sent all of the servants out of the room and was alone with his brothers. We read in 45:3-15,

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Now hurry back to my father and say to him, "This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me, don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near to me – you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.

You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.

Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

Word went out in Egypt that Joseph and his brothers had been reunited. Pharaoh was quite excited about it, because he really liked Joseph. Pharaoh told the brothers to hurry back to

Canaan and get their families and their fathers and to come to Egypt. He would put them in the best part of the land. He gave them clothes and gifts and sent them on their way.

They made their way home and told Jacob what had happened. Jacob could not believe it at first, but became convinced that it was all true. Verse 45:28 says, "Israel said, 'I'm convinced! My son Joseph is alive, and I will go and see him before I die.'"

So why did all of this have to take place? Why did Joseph have to endure slavery and prison and separation from his family? Why did so many people have to endure famine? Why did Jacob have to endure the grief of believing that Joseph was dead?

When the children of Israel lived in Canaan, which was their Promised Land, they were few among many. As we saw in the life of Judah, they began to intermarry with the Canaanites. As we saw in the life of Rachel, they still held onto some concepts such as household gods. They had to get rid of these if they were going to truly be the chosen people.

God's plan was to take the (literal) children of Israel, drop them in an Egyptian incubator for 400 years, and produce the (nation) children of Israel, a mass of people separated from others and unto him. In Canaan, these people were accepted and the people wanted to absorb them into their culture. We saw this happen in Shechem. In Egypt, the Egyptians would not even eat with them because it was considered a detestable thing for Egyptians to eat with Hebrews. Although their presence was welcome and celebrated by Pharaoh, because of his admiration of Joseph, the Israelites were forced to become a distinct people in that place. They had time to build up a mass of population and they had time to learn to rely upon God. Their exodus from that place back to the Promised Land would be their graduate education to prepare them to be the chosen people in the Promised Land.

### 1.11.11 Jacob Goes to Egypt

Genesis 46:1-47:12

Jacob and his family prepared and left Canaan. On the way they stopped at Beersheba and Jacob made an offering to God. God spoke to him and told him not to be afraid to go to Egypt. He promised to make him a great nation there and assured him that they would be brought out again.

The section lists the descendants of Jacob that went with him. Once they got to Egypt and were united with Joseph and Manasseh and Ephraim, Jacob and his descendants numbered 70 people.

Joseph met them in Goshen. He told them to tell Pharaoh that they were shepherds so that they would be allowed to live in Goshen by themselves, "for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians" (46:34). Five of Joseph's brothers were chosen as representatives and they and Jacob were presented to the Pharaoh. They told him they were shepherds and he told them they could settle in the best part of the land – in Goshen. He told Joseph that if he wanted, he could have his brothers help tend the royal flocks as well. Jacob was introduced to the Pharaoh. Jacob blessed the Pharaoh and the Pharaoh provided very well for the needs of Jacob and his family.

### 1.11.12 The Famine Continues

Genesis 47:13-31

The famine continued for several more years. People ran out of money to buy food so they sold their livestock to Pharaoh for food. After that they had nothing left to sell but their land and themselves. Joseph bought all of the land in Egypt for the Pharaoh except for the land belonging to the priests (they received a regular allotment of food and thus did not need to sell their land). When the period of famine was over, Pharaoh basically owned everything there was. Joseph continued to administer it, however, and he turned the land back to the people. He gave them seed grain and told them to plant and harvest, but that in return one fifth of the harvest would belong to the Pharaoh. Thus the people would have plenty and Pharaoh's storerooms would stay full in case anything like this ever happened again.

As for Jacob's family, (47:27)

Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.

Jacob lived in Egypt 17 years, until the age of 147. Before his death, he called Joseph and said to him, (47:29-30)

If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.

As was true with Abraham and Eleazar, putting the hand under the thigh while making an oath was a way of making a very solemn pledge. Jacob did not want to be buried in Egypt, but in the land he had been promised. He wanted to be buried in the cave at Machpelah, along with Abraham and Sarah and Isaac. He made Joseph to promise that when he died, he would not be buried in Egypt, but his body would be taken back to Canaan and buried there. Joseph agreed.

### 1.11.13 Manasseh and Ephraim

Genesis 48

In chapter 48, Joseph brought his two sons, Manasseh (the older) and Ephraim (the younger) for a visit with Jacob. Jacob used the opportunity to pronounce a significant blessing on the boys. He told Joseph that from this point on, these boys would be treated as if they were Jacob's as far as inheritance was concerned. When the people returned to the Promised Land, Manasseh and Ephraim would receive inheritances just as the other sons of Jacob would. That is why when you look at a map of the division of the land to the twelve tribes of Israel, you do not see an allocation for Joseph, but you see one for Manasseh and one for Ephraim. (Note that there is also none specifically for Levi, but we will talk about that later.)

Jacob put his right hand on the head of Ephraim (the younger) and his left hand on the head of Manasseh (the older) to speak his blessing. Joseph assumed that he could not see very well because the right hand belonged on the head of the elder son, so Joseph tried to correct him. Jacob refused and said, (48:19-20)

"I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations." He blessed them that day and said, "In your name will Israel pronounce

this blessing" "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh." So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Note that the descendants of Joseph essentially got a double share of the inheritance of Jacob as compared to the other brothers. In adopting Manasseh and Ephraim as his own, Jacob was giving Joseph the birthright for all practical purposes. When it came time to settle in the Promised Land, the descendants of Joseph did receive a disproportionate share of land.

### 1.11.14 Jacob Blesses His Sons

Genesis 49:1-28

Jacob believed that the time of his death was near. He had just taken care of Manasseh and Ephraim. He now wanted to pronounce the blessings on his sons. He had them gathered before him. The words he would speak were as important to them as were the words that Isaac spoke to Jacob and Esau in their time. Some of them would be edified and lifted up and others would be cut to the heart.

He spoke first to Reuben, his oldest. He described the potential in Reuben but said that it would all be brought down because he had defiled his father's bed, referring to the time he slept with Jacob's concubine.

He next turned to Simeon and Levi and said that they were violent men and not to be trusted. This is in reference to the events at Shechem. In 49:7 he says, "I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel." This was literally fulfilled in time. When it came time to settle in the Promised Land, the Levites did not receive a territory of land, but instead there were Levitical cities spread over the entire territory. The Levites were dispersed throughout the land. Simeon did receive a specific territory, but it was completely surrounded by the territory given to Judah and eventually Simeon's territory and people were simply absorbed into Judah.

Perhaps the most important part of the blessing went to Judah. He was the one that God had chosen to be the ancestor of the Messiah. Jacob's words to him were significant. We read in verses 49:8-10,

Judah, your brothers will praise you;  
your hand will be on the neck of your enemies,  
your father's sons will bow down to you.  
You are a lion's cub, O Judah,  
you return from the prey, my son.  
Like a lion he crouches and lies down,  
like a lioness—who dares to rouse him.  
The scepter will not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
until he comes to whom it belongs  
and the obedience of the nations is his.

This is major messianic prophecy, telling us that the chosen one will come from the tribe of Judah.

Most of the other blessings are short and to the point. Note that if you look at the way the land was distributed in the Promised Land once they entered it, it appears that the blessing given to Zebulun and the land that went to Asher go together.

The blessing given to Joseph is longer than most of the others. Joseph is still the favorite son. Jacob was right in recognizing that God's favor was truly on this man and that God continued to work through him and to use him to provide for the good of the entire family.

### 1.11.15 The Death of Jacob

Genesis 49:29-50:14

After the blessing, Jacob recognized that he was about to die. He reiterated instructions that he had already given to Joseph, and told everyone that he wanted to be buried in the cave at Machpelah, back in Canaan, where Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah are buried and where we now learn that Jacob buried Leah. Then Jacob died.

There was great mourning in the land for Jacob. Joseph had a 70 day mourning period put into effect. He had Jacob embalmed according to Egyptian practices. Then he sought permission from Pharaoh to return to Canaan to bury Jacob. Pharaoh granted the permission.

Joseph, his brothers, and many Egyptian officials returned to Canaan for the burial. There was another period of mourning once they arrived. Jacob was laid to rest with his father and grandfather.

### 1.11.16 Joseph's Brothers Wonder, "What Now?"

Genesis 50:15-26

Now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers wondered whether or not it was time for him to get even with them for selling him into slavery. They were worried. They made up a story that Jacob had left instructions for Joseph to be sure to forgive them and they sent a message to that effect to Joseph. Joseph wept when he heard it because he could see that his brothers were still carrying a great deal of guilt. He did not want that to be so. He called them together and reminded them that all that had happened had been according to God's plan. God used this to provide for them all. He wanted nothing more than for them all to live in peace as brothers. He continued to provide for them in Goshen.

Joseph lived to be 110. He lived to see the third generation of Ephraim's children. Before he died, he made his brothers promise that when time came to return to the Promised Land, they would carry his bones back with them and bury him there. He died and was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

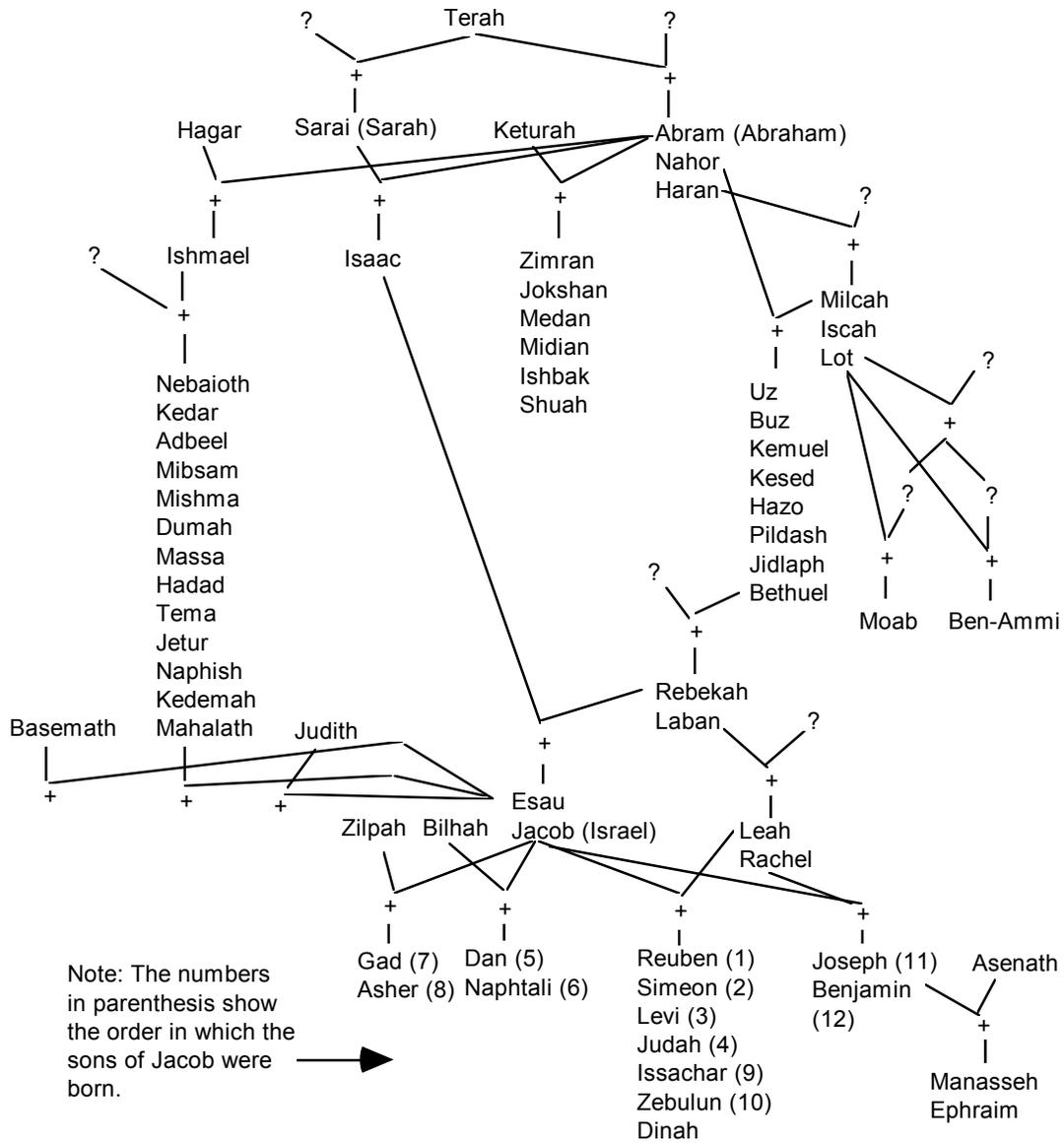
The book of Genesis closes with the seed of the young nation of Israel fresh into the incubator. It hearkens back to the word God gave to Abraham. Verses 15:13-14 say,

Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.

The period that elapsed between Genesis and Exodus represent these 400 years. Then Exodus picks up right where this left off.

## 2 Appendices

### 2.1 The Family Tree of Terah



The family included some unusual relationships. For example, Sarah was Isaac's mother and aunt. Lot was Moab's father and grandfather. Nahor was Uz's grandfather and uncle. Laban was Reuben's grandfather and great uncle.



## 2.2 Significant Names Used in The Old Testament

Today when a baby is born, most parents commonly make up lists of names that sound good with the new baby's last name. They may pull in names that have been in the family for some time or they may pick names that are currently popular. Choosing the exact name for a baby is not easy because once it is given it sticks for life. But generally people today do not attach a great deal of spiritual significance to the name given a child.

Things were different in the days when the events of Old Testament took place. The name given to a child could mark his destiny. It could carry prophetic influence in the life of the person being named. Names were assigned in accordance with the nature or the promise of the person. Thus some insight may be gained into the nature of Biblical characters if we know something about the meaning of their names.

Aaron	meaning is uncertain
Abel	In Hebrew the name is "Hebel", meaning emptiness or vanity, something transitory and unsatisfactory
Abimelech	from two Hebrew words, "ab", meaning "father" and "malik", meaning "king" – "father of the king"
Abraham	father of a multitude. Note the significance of shift in name for Abraham. His initial name could simply be a testimony to his own father – Terah. Changing the name to Abraham pinned the promise of fatherhood on him – not only that he would be a father, but that he would be the father of nations.
Abram	high father
Absalom	father of peace
Adam	Adam is a straightforward transliteration of the Hebrew word "Adam", meaning man (i.e. mankind).
Amos	from a word meaning "burden" or "load"
Arphaxad	(son of Noah) meaning is unknown
Asher	happy
Baruch	blessed
Ben Ammi	(son of Lot through daughter-in-law) In Hebrew "ben" means "son". "am" means "people". The "i" ending is a first person singular possessive ending meaning "my". Put them all together and you get "Son of my people."
Benjamin	from two Hebrew words, "Ben", meaning "son", and "jamin", meaning "right hand" – son of the right hand. Note that in Genesis 35:18, as Rachel was dying she named him Ben-Oni, which means "son of my trouble".
Bethuel	destroyed of God, wasted by God (see the "el")
Bilhah	(Rachel's maidservant, mother of Dan and Naphtali) timid
Cain	a lance or a spear
Caleb	forcible attack or the yelp of a dog
Dan	judge
Daniel	judge of God
David	loving
Dinah	justice
Eber	(son of Shelah, son of Arphaxad) across, opposite
Eleazar	God is helper

Elijah	God of Jehovah (Note – when you see an "ah" ending on a name, it is often an abbreviation of "Jehovah," which means "Lord." Examples include Hezekiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Josiah, etc.)
Elisha	God of supplication (or riches)
Enoch	(son of Cain, also son of Jared through the line of Seth) Enoch's name in Hebrew is "Chanok", meaning "initiated."
Enosh	(son of Seth) mortal
Ephraim	double fruit
Esau	rough to the touch, which might be caused by being hairy
Esther	
Eve	Eve's name in Hebrew is actually "Chavvah", which means "life giver."
Ezekiel	God will strengthen
Ezra	aid
Gad	to crowd upon, attack
Gideon	from a word meaning "to fell" or "to destroy"
God	First of all, God had two different English designations in Genesis: God and Lord. Both are used extensively. When the word "God" occurs in the text, the vast majority of times it is translating the Hebrew word "Elohim". In a fewer instances it is also used to translate the Hebrew word "El".

"El" is a word in Hebrew that, when used as an adjective, means "mighty." When used as a proper noun, it carries the meaning of "Almighty". "El" was used in Hebrew to refer to a god, but is also used to refer to God. Most words in Hebrew that end in "el" (or contain the "el" syllable) are referring to God, such as Bethel, which means "House of God."

Another such word is "Elohim". "Elohim" is a plural word that could refer to gods, but is used as a plural in reference to God to express majesty – the God of gods.

When the word "Lord" occurs in the text, it is normally a translation of the Hebrew word YHWH. I elaborated on the meaning of this word in my discussion of Genesis 1. YHWH is the word that we normally pronounce either Yahweh or Jehovah (depending on which of the two traditional pronunciation systems of Hebrew you use). It is the imperfect mood of the "to be" verb, implying "I AM, I ALWAYS HAVE BEEN, I ALWAYS WILL BE". It is a name given to one who is self-existent and eternal. This is the national name of God to the Israelites.

There are a few instances in Genesis where the English word "Lord" is used to translate the Hebrew word "Adonai." In Hebrew, when a word has a form of an "i" ending, it normally denotes a first person singular ending. In Adonai, the "i" means "my". This word is an emphatic Hebrew word meaning "My Lord."

Habakkuk	embrace
Hagar	meaning is uncertain
Haggai	festive
Ham	hot
Haran	mountaineer ("har" is Hebrew for "mountain")
Hezekiah	strengthened of the Lord

Hezron	(son of Perez, ancestor of Christ) courtyard
Isaac	laughter
Isaiah	the Lord has saved
Ishmael	God will hear (see the "el")
Israel	he will rule as God (see the "el"), one who contends with God
Issachar	he will bring a reward
Jacob	heel-catcher, carries a connotation of deceit or mistrust
Japheth	expansion
Jared	(son of Mahalalel) a descent
Jehu	the Lord is he
Jeremiah	the Lord will rise
Joel	the Lord is God
Jonah	dove
Joseph	let him add, adding, addition
Joshua	the Lord saves
Josiah	founded of the Lord
Judah	celebrated
Kenan	(son of Enosh) fixed, as a nest
Keturah	(Abraham's second wife) perfumed
Laban	white
Lamech	(son of Methushael through the line of Cain, also son of Methuselah through the line of Seth) the root meaning of this name is unknown
Leah	weary, tired, faint, disgusted
Levi	united, attached
Lot	veil, covering
Mahalalel	(son of Kenan) praise of God (see the "el") (you should recognize the "halalel" as being the root of our word, "hallelujah")
Malachi	ministrative
Manasseh	causing to forget (Joseph's firstborn helped him to forget the troubles of his past)
Melchizedek	from the two Hebrew words "malik", meaning "king" and "tsedek", meaning "right" – king of right or righteous king
Methuselah	(son of Enoch through the line of Seth) man of a dart, from the Hebrew word "shelach", meaning missile of attack, spear, or dart
Micah	who is like the Lord
Midian	brawling, contention
Milcah	queen
Miriam	rebelliously
Moab	(son of Lot through daughter-in-law) from father (consider the circumstances of his conception)
Moses	drawing out of the water
Nahor	(son of Serug and father of Terah, also a son of Terah) one who snores or snorts
Naphtali	my wrestling (the "i" ending is the first person singular modifier)
Nehemiah	consolation of the Lord
Noah	quiet, rest, resting place
Obadiah	serving the Lord
Peleg	(son of Eber) earthquake
Perez	(son of Judah, ancestor of Christ) break, breach, breaking forth (this was a breach birth)
Phinehas	mouth of a serpent
Rachel	ewe, sheep
Rebekah	fettering (by beauty)
Reu	(son of Peleg) friend

Reuben	from two Hebrew words that together mean "see, a son" ("ben" in Hebrew means "son")
Samson	sunlight
Samuel	heard of God
Sarah	princess and mistress
Sarai	princess
Saul	asked
Serug	(son of Reu) from the word meaning entwine, wrap together, wreath
Seth	substituted
Shelah	(son of Arphaxad and also son of Judah) petition, request
Shem	honor, authority, character
Simeon	hearing
Solomon	peaceful
Tamar	(mother of Perez) straight, erect, a palm tree
Terah	meaning is uncertain
Zebulun	habitation, dwelling
Zechariah	the Lord has remembered
Zephaniah	the Lord has secreted
Zilpah	(Leah's maidservant, mother of Gad and Asher) fragrant dropping

### 2.3 A Brief History of Israel

- God created the world and created man. Man rebelled and was driven from God's presence in the Garden of Eden. Things got worse and worse so God flooded the world, sparing Noah and his family. Man tried to unite against God by building the Tower of Babel but God scattered man and confused the tongues. Things turned bad again so God selected one man, Abraham, through which God would bring a message of salvation to the world. God promised Abraham (who was very old and childless) that he would have too many descendants to number. He promised a land to Abraham and his descendants.
- Abraham had Isaac. Isaac had Jacob. Jacob, also known as Israel, had twelve sons. Their descendants became the twelve tribes of Israel. Because of a famine in the land that God had promised to Abraham and his descendants, Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt. Things were OK for a while but after a period of time they became enslaved there.
- After 400 years in Egypt, God raised up Moses to lead the people back to the Promised Land. Things did not go too smoothly because of the people's stubbornness and they were forced to wander in the desert forty years before entering the land. During this time, God used Moses to give the people the books of the law (the first five books of the Bible, or the Pentateuch). After Moses' death, Joshua led the people into the Promised Land. A series of battles ensued through which the tribes of Israel took the land.
- Initially they lived with no real governmental structure, but as twelve tribes affiliated with one another. They would unite for defense when necessary. God raised up among them various leaders, known as the Judges, who would provide national leadership from time to time. The book of Judges concludes with "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." This is a nice way of saying that the land was in chaos and people were not following God. God raised up Samuel, the last judge and also a great prophet, who would usher in the monarchy, being used by God to choose and anoint the first two kings.
- The story of Ruth takes place during the time of the judges.
- First Samuel focuses on the united kingdom under Saul. Second Samuel focuses on the united kingdom under David. First and Second Kings focus on the rest of the history of the united kingdom and the divided kingdoms. This covers the period from the time of Solomon through the beginning of the end of the Southern Kingdom. First and Second Chronicles are a retelling of the story. First Chronicles gives a very brief history of the world pre-David and focuses on David's monarchy. Second Chronicles tells the story from the reign of Solomon through the beginning of the return from exile in Babylon, focusing on the Southern Kingdom only.
- Saul was the first king and reigned from around 1020 BC to around 1000 BC. His capital was at Gilbeah. The nation was united under a monarchy but retained its tribal structure. He had some military success and expanded the borders somewhat, driving out the Philistines from some areas. He was ultimately killed in battle by the Philistines at Mt. Gilboa.
- Saul's son, Ishbosheth, succeeded him very briefly. The northern tribes followed him as Saul's heir, although the southern tribes followed David right away. When Ishbosheth died, the northern tribes followed David as well. God had promised him the throne through Samuel.
- David reigned from approximately 1000 BC to approximately 961 BC. His initial capital was in Hebron but he moved it to Jerusalem. He greatly expanded the borders, "from Dan to Beersheba." The nation prospered greatly under David. Neighboring nations became vassal states to Israel and Israel was a bona fide world power. Still, the seeds of Israel's destruction were sewn under David. It began with his own sins and blossomed in the form of deterioration of his own family. David had multiple wives and children with the various wives. One of David's sons, Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar. Tamar's full brother, Absalom, waited for David to do something about it, but David never addressed the issue.

Absalom finally murdered Amnon and later led a rebellion against David. He was killed by David's general Joab. There was jealousy and intrigue in David's harem. There was the ever-hanging question of which son would succeed David. His own family was crumbling underneath him and he did not do anything about it.

- When David died, Solomon took over. He reigned from around 961 BC to 922 BC. He inherited the fruits of David's labor and continued to expand the influence and wealth of the state. During his reign there were no major wars. He began a massive building program, building the temple, palaces, and fortified military cities. They were massively expensive. He financed them by heavily taxing the people AND conscripting them into labor a certain number of months each year (a double whammy – they were forced into basically slave labor a portion of the year and heavily taxed from what they could make the rest of the year). More than likely the tribe of Judah was exempted from both the taxes and the conscripted labor, which upset the other tribes even more. Solomon sold off some cities to pay debts and also lost some territory through rebellions. He also brought religious disintegration to the nation through his foreign wives. He married daughters of foreign rulers to form alliances with their fathers but allowed them to bring their foreign religious practices to Israel. At his death he left the nation in debt and tired of his rule.
- When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam was heir apparent. The other tribes (other than Judah) were weary of Solomon's practices and asked Rehoboam whether or not he would reform. He accepted some bad advice and told the people that he would be harder than Solomon. The northern tribes said "adios" and set up the Northern Kingdom, Israel, with Jeroboam as the first king. The tribe of Judah remained with Rehoboam. Since it was geographically isolated from the other tribes, Simeon stayed with Judah. The two new nations were each weak and neither had the influence that they had collectively. They lost all of their vassal states. They almost immediately began fighting one another. Furthermore, they began trying to form alliances with other nations. Judah looked to the Arameans for support and Israel went to Egypt.
- In 918 BC, Egypt invaded Judah, probably at the request of Israel. Rehoboam had to pay tribute to Egypt and stripped the temple of its gold instruments and replaced them with bronze artifacts. More than likely, after having success with Judah, Egypt turned around and invaded Israel as well, much to Jeroboam's surprise.
- Jeroboam set up two sanctuaries (golden bulls) at Bethel and Dan (the northern and southern ends of the Northern Kingdom). Having sanctuaries at national borders marked off the territory of the nation's gods to the ancient people. Jeroboam wanted to stop the people from going to Jerusalem to worship. Jeroboam might not have been trying to get rid of the God of Israel. The move seems to have been politically motivated, not religiously. However, in doing this, he set up an apostate religious system in the Northern Kingdom that is one of the primary reasons that Jews (i.e. residents of the Southern Kingdom of Judah) began to see Samaritans (i.e. residents of the Northern Kingdom of Israel) as unclean.
- Judah and Israel were involved in constant border conflicts. The territory of Benjamin seems to have been a major point of contention.
- Omri was one of the more successful kings of the Northern Kingdom. He moved the capital to Samaria. He had great military strength. In an alliance with Tyre, his son Ahab married Jezebel. There was peace with Judah during this period and Judah prospered during this time. Ahab's daughter Athalia married Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram. The influence of this family was very evil and ultimately Jehu purged the house of Omri, both in Israel and in Judah. The alliance between the two nations was lost.
- The Assyrians and Arameans continued to be alternating threats over time. During the first half of the 8th century BC (800 - 750) both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms experienced a period of great prosperity (under Jehoash and Jeroboam II in Israel and Amaziah and Uzziah in Judah). This set the stage for excesses of which the prophets spoke (e.g. Amos). This ended with the renewed Assyrian power of Tiglath-Pileser III (745 - 727 BC). He made vassal states of many of the neighboring states.

- Isaiah was a prophet in the Southern Kingdom during the last year of Uzziah, through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Hosea was a prophet in Northern Kingdom during its last 25 years or so. Amos was a prophet from the Southern Kingdom but ministered to the Northern Kingdom during the reigns of Uzziah in the South and Jeroboam II in the North. Jonah was a contemporary of Amos, from the Northern Kingdom, sent to Ninevah. Micah was a prophet of the Southern Kingdom during the time of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.
- In 735 BC, Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus decided to revolt and not pay taxes to Tiglath-Pileser. They tried to force Ahaz of Judah to join them in the rebellion. Ahaz refused. They attacked and laid siege to Jerusalem. Ahaz sent a message to Tiglath-Pileser asking for help even though Isaiah told him not to do so. (This is also the opportunity for the Isaiah prophecy, “The Lord Himself will give you a sign, Behold a virgin will conceive ...”.) Tiglath-Pileser responded and invaded Israel, greatly reducing its size (the rest was annexed to Assyria). Damascus was destroyed. Ahaz (Judah) became an Assyrian vassal as a result.
- Tiglath-Pileser III died in 727 BC and Israel and some other territories revolted. His successor, Shalmenesar V responded. He besieged Samaria for 3 years. Shalmenesar died, and the city was finally taken by Sargon II in 722 BC. Thus the Northern Kingdom lasted from 922 BC to 722 BC. The Israelites were deported and other people were moved in to occupy the land. The people were disbursed and forced to inter-marry, becoming half-breeds and totally losing their tribal identity. The ones that were left behind in Israel intermarried with those moving in and with the Philistines and became the Samaritans of the New Testament.
- Hezekiah succeeded Ahaz. When Sargon II died in 705 BC, Hezekiah rebelled against the Assyrian influence. Sennacherib came to the Assyrian throne. Hezekiah anticipated an attack and fortified Jerusalem and some other cities. He built the water tunnel into Jerusalem. In 701 the attack came. Forty-six Judean fortified cities were taken. While encamped outside Jerusalem one night an angel killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Jerusalem was saved but Judah was greatly reduced and Hezekiah did end up paying tribute to Sennacherib.
- Following Hezekiah are Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah. Josiah was righteous and made religious reforms. Judah enjoyed peace with Assyria during the reign of these kings.
- Nahum was a prophet of the Southern Kingdom during the time of Josiah. Contemporary prophets of the Southern Kingdom during this time include Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Obadiah, and Ezekiel (although Ezekiel’s prophecies came during exile in Babylon).
- Around 614 BC, the Babylonians and the Medes formed an alliance and attacked and subdued Assyria. The king of Babylon was Nabopolassar and his son was Nebuchadnezzar. Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt tried to assist the king of Assyria. In 609 BC, Josiah was killed in Megiddo trying to stop Neco. Jehoahaz succeeded him. On the way back from battle, Neco deposed Jehoahaz and put Jehoiakim in his place as king. Judah became a puppet state of Egypt.
- In 605 BC at the battle of Carchemish, Babylon defeated Egypt under General Nebuchadnezzar. Then Nabopolassar died back home. Nebuchadnezzar returned home. This spared Egypt from becoming completely a Babylonian vassal that year (and also Judah since Judah was a puppet of Egypt). In 604 and 603 Nebuchadnezzar returned to the area with renewed military campaigns. Jehoiakim broke away from Egypt and became a Babylonian vassal.
- The prophecy of Habakkuk was approximately coincident with the battle of Carchemish.
- Jehoiakim rebelled around 601 and was captured. Jehoiachin succeeded him. He ruled until March 16, 597, and gave up when the city was sacked. In 597 BC was the first deportation of people from Judah to Babylon. (Daniel would have been one of the earlier exiles to Babylon.) Babylon treated its conquered people differently than Assyria. They were taken away, but allowed to live in communities and to retain their identities. They had

fairly prosperous lives in Babylon. Ezekiel would have been taken in the first deportation and prophesied from Babylon.

- Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon and his uncle, Zedekiah, was put in his place. The bulk of Jeremiah's prophecies were under Zedekiah. Jeremiah did not like him.
- Zedekiah rebelled around 589. Babylon sieged Judah and ravaged it. In 587-586 BC they totally destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple. Zedekiah fled towards Jericho. He was captured and taken to Babylon. He was forced to watch his sons being slain and then he had his eyes put out. The second deportation was in 586 BC.
- Nebuchadnezzar set up Gedaliah as king over what was left of Judah. His capital was at Mizpeh (Jerusalem was gone). Jeremiah had the option to go to Babylon or to stay and he chose to stay (even though it was probably much nicer in Babylon). Gedaliah was assassinated. Nebuchadnezzar sent his army. Many people fled to Egypt and they made Jeremiah go with them. They set up a Jewish colony in Egypt called Elephantine. The third deportation to Babylon occurred in 592 BC.
- The date of Joel's prophecy is uncertain. It is probably pre-exilic, but the dating is unknown.
- The exile lasted from 597 - 539 BC. The Jews in Babylon were not really slaves. They led lives of relative freedom and financial success. Many rose to high positions. Daniel and Ezekiel were written during this period. The Babylonian Empire was short-lived, however. Nebuchadnezzar died. The Persians and Medes gathered to fight them. (The Persian king was Cyrus.) Babylon fell in 540 BC. Cyrus was the new king. In 539 BC he issued the edict to let the Jews return and rebuild the temple. In 515 BC it was finished.
- Cyrus (559-530 BC) was followed by several Persian kings, including Cambyses (530-522 BC), Smerdis (522 BC), Darius I (521-486 BC), Xerxes (also known as Ahasuerus) (485-465 BC), and Artaxerxes I (also known as Artashasta) (464-424 BC). Darius I was king when Haggai and Zechariah prophesied. He was king when the temple was completed. Ezra ministered during his reign, and continued to minister on into the reign of Artaxerxes. Xerxes was the king who made Esther queen. Artaxerxes I was the king during the ministry of Nehemiah and during the ministry of Malachi.
- After the prophecies of Malachi, there were approximately 400 "years of silence" until the coming of John the Baptist, who is the last prophet of the old covenant.
- The Persians continued to rule until around 330 BC. The Jews were allowed a great deal of freedom, including religious freedom, during this time.
- Around 330 BC Alexander the Great, a Greek, began domination of the known world. He conquered the Persians and took control of the land of Israel. This Greek military conquest had the side effect of spreading Greek culture and the Greek language. The world adopted Greek as the common language of business. Educated people could converse in Greek. God gave the world a very rich and a universal language that would be used to write the New Testament. During this time, the Jews who had settled in Egypt (Elephantine) translated the scriptures of the Old Testament into Greek, producing the Septuagint. This became a universally available Bible to the people of the time (i.e. a copy of the scriptures in the language of the people). When the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament, it is typically the Septuagint that is being quoted. Alexander's rule only lasted around 10 years. Following that, the land of Israel was under the rule of the Ptolemies of Egypt and then under the Seleucids of Syria. Both of these rulers maintained a Hellenistic culture. The Seleucids began to enforce Hellenistic ways on their subjects. Judaism was outlawed under Antiochus Epiphanies. Pigs were sacrificed in the temple and an altar to Zeus was erected in it.
- In 166 BC, the Maccabean revolt occurred. Righteous Jews rebelled against the Syrian rulers and gained control of the land of Israel. This was the first time since before the exile that the land had been under Jewish control. The period from 166 BC to 63 BC is known as the Hasmonean period. The Festival of Dedication or the Festival of Lights, also known as Hanukkah, commemorates the rededication of the temple by the Maccabees.
- In 63 BC, Jerusalem was conquered by Rome and the Promised Land came under Roman domination. This set the stage for the events of the New Testament. There were several

important side effects of Roman domination. First of all, the Romans were brutal to their enemies, but the result of that was that peace prevailed among their subjects, who were afraid to do anything but submit. Because of that, international travel was easy and common. This made it easy for the gospel to spread. Second, Romans were builders. Herod was set up by the Romans as the ruler of Israel. He undertook massive building projects. One of the things that he did to try to pacify the Jews was to basically rebuild the temple. The temple of Jesus' day was Herod's temple, which was a massively remodeled and expanded Zerubbabel's temple.

- Between the close of Malachi's prophesy and the beginning of the first century, several developments occurred in Judaism. First of all, the canon of Hebrew Scripture was closed and organized into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The synagogue became a permanent fixture in Jewish life, focusing on a teaching-based, nonsacrificial form of worship. Rabbinism came into being, with the rabbis, or teachers emerging as an important part of the culture. The Jews themselves began organizing into factions. The primary parties of Jews were the Sadducees, with an emphasis on a very legalistic study of the law, and the Pharisees, with an emphasis on the priesthood. Two other factions existed as well. The Essenes were a separatist group, seeing the Sadducees and Pharisees as being somewhat apostate. They tended to live in communities off to themselves. The community at Qumran, which preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls, was one such community. John the Baptist is thought to have been heavily influenced by the Essenes. The other faction is the Zealots, which was more of a political movement, seeking political freedom for the nation. During this time, racial hatred grew between the Jews and the Samaritans.
- From around 3 BC to around 30 AD, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.
- In the late 60s, the Jews revolted against Roman domination. Rome came down hard on them. In 70 AD, the city of Jerusalem including the temple, was destroyed by Rome. About all that was left was the western retaining wall of the temple compound, now known as the Wailing Wall. A few hundred Jews were able to hold out for three years in Herod's mountain fortress, called Massada, but they were eventually defeated as well. After that, the Jews were a disbursed and homeless people for almost 2000 years.
- The land of Israel remained under Roman rule through the 500s. During the 600s, Arabs conquered the area and spread their new religion, Islam. In the 1000s, the Turks took over the area. At the end of the 1000s, the Crusades began and European Christians took over control of the area. Towards the end of the 1100s, the Muslim leader Saladim took over the area. In the mid-1200s, it came under Egyptian control. Then 1517, the Ottoman Turks conquered Palestine.
- In the late 1800s, Jews began to experience various forms of oppression in Europe. This triggered what is known as the Zionist movement. Masses of Jews began to return to Israel. The area was still under control of the Ottomans and that government opposed the movement. Still colonies of Jews began to develop in Israel. By the 1910s, the masses of Arabs living in Palestine began formal opposition to this resettling of Jews, because the stated goal of the Zionist movement was to form an independent Jewish state in Palestine.
- World War I resulted in British control over Palestine. In 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, which was official support for a Jewish state, although it expressed support for the Arabs living in the region as well. There were various proposals given for how to implement the declaration. They met with various forms of protest from Jews and Arabs alike. The declaration was never really implemented.
- During the second world war, Adolph Hitler led an impassioned effort to rid the world of Jews. This prompted more and more Jews to return to Israel. It also prompted a certain amount of global sympathy for the problems of the Jews. Great Britain asked the United Nations to deal with the Palestinian problem. On November 29, 1947 the UN adopted a plan dividing Palestine into two independent states, one Jewish and one Arab. The Jews

accepted the plan. The Arabs did not. The surrounding Arab nations immediately prepared for war against the new Jewish state.

- On May 14, 1948, under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion, Israel declared itself to be an independent nation. The next day, her Arab neighbors attacked.
- Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan all attacked Israel on May 15, 1948. By the end of 1948, Israel had defeated them all. This can only be called a miracle. Israel had not only secured the borders given to it by the UN resolution, but it had taken control of about half of what was to be the Arab state as well. The UN resolution had called for Jerusalem to be under international control. Israel had occupied about half of that city as well. The nation of Jordan controlled the other half of the city.
- Egypt continued to harass Israel from the Gaza strip, which was controlled by Egypt at this time. They harassed Israeli ships in the Suez canal area. In July of 1956, they seized the Suez Canal from England and France. On October 29, 1956, Israel, England, and France went to war against Egypt. Egypt was beaten back from these areas during this war.
- Border skirmishes continued between Israel and her Arab neighbors. They intensified in the mid-1960s. War seemed eminent. The UN had peacekeeping troops in the Sinai peninsula to serve as a buffer between Egypt and Israel. In May of 1967, Egypt ordered these troops out of the Sinai. Knowing that war was about to happen, Israel attacked first. On June 5, 1967, Israel attacked airfields in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. They destroyed the air power of all three nations. Then they set about to defeat the land troops. By June 10, 1967, they occupied the Gaza Strip, the Sinai peninsula, the Golan heights, and all Jordanian territory west of the Jordan river (now known as the West Bank). Included in that was the rest of Jerusalem. This miraculous war is known as the Six-Day War.
- On Yom Kippur (October) of 1973, Egypt and Syria again attacked Israel, expecting to find them militarily weak on this holy day. War erupted. They battled Egypt until January of 1974 and Syria until May of 1974. Israel was able to defend her borders during this war.
- Since 1973, there have been a number of efforts to establish peace in the area. In 1979, the Camp David Peace Treaty was signed between Israel and Egypt. As a result of this treaty, Israel withdrew from the Sinai peninsula. Other more recent peace agreements have resulted in Israel returning areas back to groups of Arabs to establish self-rule. A very uneasy peace has settled over the land. Hostilities and hatreds still run deep.

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4)

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