Genesis - Beginnings

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Savoring the Supremacy of God
Studying the Word of God
Shaping the People of God
Spreading the Gospel of God
Contents

The Book – Tapestry and Trajectory 1
The Beginning 9
The Garden & Companions 19
The Fall: Introduction of Sin 27
The Brothers: Escalation of Sin 37
The Corruption: The Spread of Sin 45
The Flood: Judgment on Sin 53
Into the New Creation 71
The Spread of the Nations 79
The Follower and the Fearful 87
The Generous Worshipper 95
The Humble Warrior 101
The Righteous Believer 109
An Impatient Faith 117
The New Names 123
The Hopeful Intercessor 129
Righteous Lot 135
Repeating the Same Old Sins 143
Being Polished by God 151
God Testing His People 157
What about Dying? 163
Loyalty and Faithfulness 169
The Circle of Life 177
Despising the Important 183
God with Us 189
Deceitful Gain 195
Stairway to Heaven 201
Getting What You Deserve 209
Heart Idols in a Troubled Home 213
Clever Sins 219
The Trouble with In-Laws
Facing Up To Consequences
The Problem of Vengeance
Life’s Difficult Tensions
From Son to Slave
Be Sure Your Sins Will Find You Out
Fleeing Sin
The Ups and Downs of God’s Providence
The Rise to Power
Troubled Souls in Testing Trials
Twice Tested
Repentance and Reunion
Protection and Provision
Faith in Mature Saints
Blessing and Destiny
Sweet and Hard Providences
Glorying in Christ through Genesis
Growing in Faith through Genesis
The Grandeur of God in Genesis
Outlines
Beginnings are hard things. Some beginnings are small and insignificant leading to great things. Some beginnings are doorways to mazes. Some beginnings are videos panning over the landscape. Some beginnings are train stations – just a place to get on the train and start the trip.

This beginning about the Book of Beginnings, the Genesis of all not God, will unfold through two images, two metaphors. I aim to be a sort of travelogue to the book. Here is the map. Here is journey. Here are some delights. Here are some dangers. Now, meet me here next Sunday and we will board the train and take off down the track.

Tapestry – Its Place in the Scripture

Our approach to Genesis can like that of understanding a tapestry. A tapestry is a superb and useful decoration woven with consummate skill, intricate design, both common and quality materials, lasting service and stunning beauty. While each thread is necessary, it gains its significance, importance and beauty as it is intertwined with all the other threads. The weaver intends a design and implements a process so that the end product reflects his love and wisdom.

So how is the tapestry we have in our Bibles called Genesis made so as to display the manifold wisdom and beauty of God?

Its Maker – the Biblical Author

We must begin with a larger affirmation grounded in the Scriptures as a whole. We affirm that the Bible in all its parts is the very plenary inspired Word of God, inerrant and infallible. The Bible was given by through human instrumentality as men wrote the Scriptures, using the physical, logical, rhetorical materials and methods in their own personalities and styles yet so attended and borne along by the Holy Spirit that what was written is God’s Word.

This affirmation is critical to guide and guard our investigation into who the human author was.

- It must guide us so that our investigation begins with and relies on the testimony of the Bible itself. If the Bible tells who the human author was, then that settles the issue. The human author is assumed to have developed his materials using the ordinary methods common to his day. But what was produced was still the divinely inspired work of that person.

- It must guard us so that we reject the kind of critical research which first denies Divine inspiration and Biblical integrity so as to challenge the claims for authorship made by the Bible. There are many theories of origins, of source documents, of altered myths all being compiled into Genesis in such a way as to deny the inerrancy and infallibility of the text.

The Bible itself declares and attests that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. This is attested to in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Numerous verses attest to the direct Mosaic authorship of Exodus through Deuteronomy. However, there are no direct attributions of Genesis to Moses. Even the most conservative of
scholars will generally say that Moses is the compiler, editor and unifying writer. He had many sources including traditions, writings and direct words from God. So, under the direct work of the Holy Spirit, Moses produced the book of Genesis so that what we have is the very Word of God. God had uniquely prepared him through his education in Egypt at Pharaoh’s court. God also enabled him through his prophetic gift given by the Holy Spirit.

Its Fabric– the Foundational Materials
A tapestry is woven together from many threads and materials. Most human composition is the result of investigation, compilation, reflection and then production. This is certainly the case with many books in the Bible. Attempting to ascertain where those materials came from and what they were is almost always a speculative enterprise at best. It is often agenda driven aimed at undermining the Bible’s authenticity and authority.

However, when there are clear seams in the material often along genre lines, then we must acknowledge these as being in the text. They may be very helpful to us in unpacking the text.

Genesis is primarily narrative material. Please note that I am avoiding the word, “history”. The way their culture wrote history and the way our culture thinks we write history is very different. However, all history is written from within a cultural and philosophical stand-point and is always making a point. The Bible authors tend to be self-conscious that they are choosing their narratives and linking them together to serve a thematic and theological purpose. Genesis is no different. Moses has at his disposal a wide array of narratives from both written and oral sources. He places them in the book according to God’s plan, God’s instructive and illustrative purposes.

Genesis is also comprised of genealogical material. The genealogies serve to establish lineages. They are very important to serve the theme of the “Seed” in Genesis. The importance of these genealogies is picked up in Matthew and Luke who rely on them to establish Jesus’ connection to Adam, to Israel and to David. The genealogies also establish a time-line. I know that many disagree with this. Regardless of whether generations are being skipped, the early genealogy from Adam to Noah and then Noah to Abraham can be used to calculate the year of Adam’s creation, the year of the Flood and the year Abraham leaves Ur.

Genesis contains some poetry. The book opens with a long creation-epic poem. It also contains the lyrics of some songs. Curiously, the Psalms record a song by Moses, so it should not surprise us that this genre was used as well.

Its Design – the Structural Makeup
The structural makeup of Genesis is very complex. There appear to be three primary designs interlocking so as to give unity and strength to this long work. The amazing intricacy of the composition of the Book should cause us to celebrate the genius of Moses and the wisdom of God. These three designs are not three ways of seeing the book – they are woven through-out the book with all three present in any given unit of text (pericope).

ToleDots – The Physical Arrangement
After the prologue in which the creation of all things is described, Moses announces ten initiatives by God in salvation history with the words, “these are the generations of ___.” These headings are known as ToleDots. At the end of each unit, Moses gives a transition that moves his argument and theme forward in preparation for the next unit. These units
are about the descendents of the person referred to rather than the person themselves. These provide clear textual breaks almost like chapters in a modern book.

*See page 8 for a table of these ToleDot Units.*

**Chiasms – The Literary Arrangement**

Chiasms are the alternating patterns or parallel arrangements of the ideas or subjects of the text. They occur in five cycles with two sets of linking materials parallel to one another. The five cycles are as follows:

- **Pre-Flood Cycle** 1:1-11:26 → alternating structure
- **Abraham Cycle** 11:27-22:24 > concentric structure
  - **Transitional** 23:1-25:18 parallel with 35:23a-36:43a
- **Jacob Cycle** 25:19-35:22 > concentric structure
- **Joseph Cycle** 37:2-50:26 > concentric structure

This literary arrangement was a common literary device in the Hebrew language. Hebrew poetry’s rhythm and repetition are built on the kinds of structures. While we use indented outlines to show the logical arrangement and order of ideas, a Hebrew thinker and writer would use these for the same purpose.

*See page 8 for examples of these cycles.*

**Motifs – The Thematic Arrangement**

Like threads through a tapestry, running through the whole book are the themes or motifs. If you think of the ToleDot as chapters and the Chiasms as cycles, then these are the ideas that are being developed, chapter by chapter, layer by layer, cycle by cycle.

Let me just briefly list some of the most important motifs. Hopefully, you will also be able to see them running through the Pentateuch and through the whole Bible. Many of these threads are bought to a conclusion or climax in the Book of Revelation where they are clearly and specifically referred to.

- Failure and Hope – man’s problem and God’s provision
- Cursing and Blessing – living before the face and in the presence of a Sovereign God
- Promise and Fulfillment – A covenant making and covenant keeping God
- Descendent and Land – God’s people and their dwelling place
- Sacrifice and Salvation – Death and life dealing with sin

There are many other themes, but we will leave them to unfold as we work our way through the book.
Its Audience – the Intentional Message

Who is the book intended for? An improper use of some study methods (hermeneutics) would say that the message of Genesis is only what the original hearers were intended to understand. I am in significant disagreement with that. Yes, we must understand what God intended to communicate to the original audience. We have to have that right first. But, the Scriptures consistently demonstrate that later revelation illuminates the message so that later audiences understand the message in a deeper, richer and more Christ-centric way than the original hearers could possibly understand.

Immediate Target – Israel

First, there is the immediate audience. The nation of Israel is in the wilderness and needs to know their God and their history. For them, the essential message is one of identity. Who are they and how did they get here. Genesis and Exodus as Volume 1 and Volume 2 of Israel’s early history answer those two great questions.

As we walk through the ToleDot units and the literary cycles, we will be looking for what was important for Israel to understand so as to rightly worship and walk with their God. Genesis will provide for them a Biblical Theology imbedded in salvation/redemptive history as an interpretive key to their lives.

Wider Spectators – Gentiles

There is also the wider audience of the Gentiles around Israel. The book of Genesis functions to expose their myths, exhibit the righteousness and wrath of God, and explain the way to be restored to God. It also calls them to hope in the God of Israel who is pleased to redeem for Himself those people who will bow to His rule.

Long-Term Audience – God’s People

As the rest of the Bible unfolds, the earlier books are given more and more light. The creation narrative is made much clearer by later texts. But most importantly, the New Testament declares that the Old is intended for us. God had its words written in a way that is for us. The reason for this is the coming of the Lord Jesus to whom all the Old Covenant points. Under the supervision of the Holy Spirit, the events that are recorded were selected and written down in such a way as to show us the greater realities later.

Now, this is easy to demonstrate. Israel, the son of God, was sent down to Egypt, called up out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and was tempted in the wilderness, failing at every point. But Matthew shows us Jesus, the new Israel and God’s true son went down to Egypt, came up out of Egypt, was baptized in Jordan and was tempted in the wilderness, succeeding at every point. The events of Genesis and Exodus, the events of Jesus life are chosen and recorded in order to show us that Jesus is the true Son, the Israel of God.

It is important for me to remind you at this point that we do not teach the idea that God has one purpose for Israel and another for the church. Nor do we teach the idea that the church has replaced Israel. We teach that Israel and the church are both brought into Christ so that there is a true eternal union between them that exhibits the manifold wisdom of God and the displays His very great glories.
Trajectory – Its Place in Redemptive History

Let us think together with the image/idea of a trajectory. A trajectory is the direction or path something will take as a result of design and movement. The trajectory of an arrow is its flight path resulting from the type of arrow, the head on its fore, the fletching on its tail combined with the power of the bow that launches it and the eye of the shooter who aimed it.

Its Foundational Importance

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate.” Mark 10:1-9 [ESV]

Genesis is foundational to our understanding of redemptive history. It is the divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant record and interpretation of the beginning.

It is foundational to the understanding of origins. From the book of Genesis we learn the origins of the cosmos, of sin, of Israel, of the themes of redemptive history. We know how and why the sacrifices began. And we know that when everything begins, God is.

It is foundational to the unfolding of Biblical themes. Most Biblical themes begin to unfold in Genesis. The themes of sin, sacrifice, covenant, a people of God, the land, God’s rule, and the world all emerge through the narratives.

It is foundational to the placing of the Old Covenant. Genesis anchors the Old Covenant in the redemptive story line and in history. It provides the historical backdrop for the Old Covenant, particularly, the development from individuals, to families, to a nation. It is clear about the limitations they experienced in walking with God while occasionally showing glimpses of the greater that is to come.

It is foundational to the identity of God’s people. Genesis establishes what it means to be related to God as a people through promises and covenants. It identifies God’s people individually and corporately. Through these identities, types and metaphors are defined and described that later are used to give an identity and self-description to God’s people who are both Jew and Gentile. These metaphors point to Christ and to the church in Christ.
Its Christological Center

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Luke 24:25-27 [ESV]

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:29-32 [ESV]

Genesis is the fountainhead of truth about Jesus. He and His redeeming work are beginning to be revealed, albeit in the shadow land of the Old Covenant.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus’ sovereign rule. We find that God expects to rule and to be the titular king over His people. He establishes that rule through His covenant and His Word.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus’ personal identity. All through the book, the Spirit shines on characters in the narratives that are shadows of the substance, the Lord Jesus.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus’ saving mission. Flowing from the words of sacrifice, come the streams of saving mercies through a Savior. By the end of Genesis, all readers are expected to understand that animals being sacrificed are a substitute until the true Sacrifice comes.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus’ martial union. Through the metaphor of marriage and the stories of marriage, we begin to have a glimpse into the union of Christ with His bride. The great mystery that Paul explores in Ephesians is tied to the marriage of Adam and Eve, to the institution of marriage itself.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus’ ultimate victory. While fallenness and failures tend to dominate the text, there are grand moments of victory over sin and the enemies of God. In these we begin to see the Great War our soul’s enemy has waged and his eventual defeat.

Its Eschatological Aim

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. Ephesians 1:7-10 [ESV]

Genesis shapes the eschatological trajectory of the redeeming and ruling purposes of God. What God aims to accomplish through history, Genesis launches from the powerful bow of its text.

It has an aim grounded in future expectation. Since we are to read Genesis with Hebrews in our hands, we know that the characters in the book believe greater things than the book actually records. We know Abraham is looking for a heavenly city, not only because Hebrews tells us this, but also because Abraham lives as a nomad in his own land.

It has a force empowered by Divine character. Over and over again, Genesis grounds the deeds of God in the character of God. The path of all that is launched in Genesis moves with the powerful force and energy and inertia of God’s great character.
It has a flight shaped by metaphorical expressions. The metaphors used in Genesis are not themselves the realities. The realities are spiritual and divine. If there are fathers in earth, it is because there is a Father in heaven. If there is a people of God on earth, it is because there will be a people of God in the heavens. If we are going to understand a great deal of the New Testament, we have to read the Old Testament to see what God meant by these images and types. And the New Testament more clearly shows us what those images and types point to.

**Its Practical Use**

Genesis also has an important “for us” aspect. Genesis (and all the Old Testament) was written with both its immediate and ultimate audiences in view. There are not multiple intentionalities or interpretations for the different audiences. The grand message of Genesis is for both audiences, but with an ever so much greater light for us.

**For our Instruction**

*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. Romans 15:4-7 [ESV]*

It was written so that its instruction for us would bring endurance and encouragement to us. Through its narratives, God illumines His own character with intensely practical implications and hope fueling motivations. God has given us a pipe, a Biblio-conduit through which what He intends to give flows. Its teaching us is intended to transform us.

**For our Illustration**

*Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:11-13 [ESV]*

It was written so that its illustrations to us would graphically and visually warn us of our dangers from sin and our delights in God. In addition to all we have already said, the narrative of Genesis powerfully exemplifies what can happen to God’s friends and to God’s enemies. Through them we are morally warned and spiritually equipped to recognize the common lot of fallenness, the shared experience of temptations and the glorious power for victory through the promises of God believed in an obeying way.

So let us bend our hearts, the attention and focus of our thoughts, so that Genesis heard and heeded will instruct us for our faith and illustrate for our practical profit.
The ToleDot Units
The following is taken from *Genesis* by Bruce Waltke.

The Account of Passage Transition
The heavens and the earth 2:4–4:26 4:25–26
Adam’s Line 5:1–6:8 6:1–8
Noah’s Sons Line 10:1–11:9 11:1–9
Shem’s Line 11:10–11:26 11:26
Ishmael’s Line 25:12–18 25:1–11 (dual transition)
Esau’s Line 36:1–37:1 37:1
Jacob’s Line 37:2–50:26 46:2–50:26 Transition to the Book of Exodus

Examples of the Chiastic Cycles
THE PRIMEVAL CYCLE

A Creation story: first beginning; divine blessing 1:1–2:3
   B Sin of Adam: nakedness; seeing/covering nakedness; Curse 2:4 – 3:24
      C No descendants of murdered younger, righteous son Abel 4:1–16
         D Descendants of sinful son Cain 4:17–26
            E Descendants of chosen son Seth: ten generations from Adam to Noah 5:1–32
               F Downfall: unlawful union 6:1–4
                  G Brief introduction to Noah through whom God will save humanity 6:5–8
A’ Flood story: reversal of creation; new beginning; divine blessing 6:9 – 9:19
   B’ Sin of Noah: nakedness, seeing/covering nakedness; curse 9:20–29
      C’ Descendants of younger, righteous son Japheth 10:1-5
         D’ Descendants of sinful son Ham 10:6–20
            E’ Descendants of chosen son Shem: ten generations from Noah to Terah 10:21–32
               F’ Downfall: rebellious union (Tower of Babel) 11:1–9
                  G’ Brief introduction of Abraham, through whom God will bless humanity 11:27–32

THE ABRAMAHIC CYCLE

A Genealogy of Terah 11:27–32
   B Promise of a son and start of Abraham’s spiritual odyssey 12:1–9
      C Abraham lies about Sarah; the Lord protects her in foreign place 12:10–20
         D Lot settles in Sodom 13:1–18
            E Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot militarily 14:1–24
               F Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Ishmael 15:1–16:16
                  F’ Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Isaac 17:1–18:15
                     E’ Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot in prayer 18:16–33
                        D’ Lot flees doomed Sodom and settles in Moab 19:1–38
                           C’ Abraham lies about Sarah; the Lord protects her in foreign palace 20:1–18
                              B’ Birth of son and climax of Abraham’s spiritual odyssey 21:1–22:19
                                A’ Genealogy of Nahor 22:20–24
The Beginning
Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

Introduction

Into the silence and darkness deep,
“BE” rings forth from the Creator
Leaping out of nothing comes everything
Being with joy and gladness
At the hand of their Maker.

Genesis 1 begins the beginning. It opens with a simple and solemn declaration. God is; God speaks; all comes into existence; God is pleased; God rests.

Development around the Text

Let’s begin by zooming out and seeing the development of the larger setting.

A Creation ending with God at rest
B Creation ending with man residing in the garden
B Corruption ending with man removed from the garden
A Corruption ending with man calling on God

Issues in the Text

There are no such things as brute facts. All data is perceived, selected and interpreted through some system of thought. The Bible intends from the very first word, to be the authoritative system of belief through which all experience and reality are to be interpreted. The Bible establishes a bounded physical universe residing in God who is creator and sustainer. The universe is not a self-sustaining engine. It is governed by laws whose properties are describable and predictable. Christian investigation of reality must take into account the non-physical reality behind, surrounding and permeating the physical reality yet, distinct from it. All creatures (humans) doing science have a starting point – the question is, is it the starting point of a Sovereign creating God who has made everything, given everything its meaning and interpreted that meaning for us in the Bible. (Adapted, F. Schaeffer)

As we come to some issues in the text, we will take them up one at a time. I know there is significant controversy over most of these issues. I have neither the time, expertise nor intellect to settle them. The arguments over many of these issues are speculative at best.

Many of the issues we face are not driven by difficulties in the text. These issues did not exist for anyone until the emergence of evolution and its acceptance as fact. Evolution is a pagan system of thought whose design from the beginning was to give an alternative explanation to reality and to remove accountability to
God. Thus we have to deal with issues forced onto the text by Christians trying to harmonize the text with a pagan philosophy. It is particularly frustrating when the Genesis account was designed from the beginning to counter the pagan myths of the day all of whom included an evolutionary scheme, over long periods of time, with the power for change and development imbedded in the system represented by the various deities who were themselves an inherit part of the physical order. In other words, Genesis is designed to counter pagan myths, whether they come in the religions of ancient mythologies or in the religion of modern sciences.

Now, do not hear me to be saying that science is wrong, evil, etc. Science as it is modernly defined is the investigation of the natural processes. Christians, as regents and having dominion over this earth, ought to study and investigate that order. But, we must do so in a God-centered, Bible-believing, pride-abasing way.

Approach to the Text

The following principles will govern our exposition:

**The text shapes its own structure.**

The text gives us a literary structure and a logical structure. The literary structure is on “days”. The logical structure keys on formless and empty moving toward formed and filled with the aim, a place for man to rule and time for God to rest.

**The text defines its own meaning.**

Moses expects his readers to understand at the level of the language what is being said. While he is not attempting to convey scientific information, the words here mean what they say. Later writers will expand on some of the ideas, but they serve to make what is being said here clearer and richer, not different.

**The text yields its own complexity.**

This is to say that through Genesis 1, the text is giving more and more detail and complexity. As the account moves closer to the creation of man, more and more detail is given. It is clear that God’s design and creation of Adam and Eve are the high-point in the narrative. Everything is bringing us to the emergence of God’s regent and the entrance into God’s rest.
Prologue (v.1-2)
Genesis opens with a summary of the creation of the cosmos and initial state of the universe.

Summary (v.1)
The opening words establish three of the most important facts for Christian thinking:

There was a beginning.
There was a time when there was nothing but God. All that is not God had a beginning, a when that it came into existence. The Bible constantly attests to this. This fact then is an open denial of any pagan idea of the un-beginning existence of anything. All the mythologies of the past and present assert the un-beginning existence of some form of matter/energy. This is false. All that is not the God of the Bible, began.

God exists at the beginning.
Only God has always been. God’s existence is simply assumed and asserted. There is no argument made to prove His existence. The key texts, particularly in John 1 and Colossians, all state this just as Genesis does. The Bible simply asserts that God is, calling people who deny that fools, insane, or reprobate. In other words, to argue for the existence of God is to grant man a power that the Bible does not. We are to simply accept His existence as fact; all else is folly and rebellion.

God is the source of all that is not God.
All that exists that is not God has come into being by His creating will and power. Again, the Bible attests to not only this fact, but also that all that exists is upheld and sustained by God. God is the ultimate environment for all things and the ultimate sustainer of all things.

The “heavens and the earth” here stands for the entire universe. This summary statement gathers up everything: heaven, the heavenly beings, the universe and all it contains. Many Scriptures point to the presence of angels at the creation of the earth and our local system within the universe. The Genesis account does not specifically mention their creation, but we would place that grand event as a part of this opening summary.

State (v.2)
Two words characterize the state of the earth when the narrative picks up. It was without form and empty. What this means is illuminated by what is done in the rest of the chapter. These two words form the literary structure for the days of creation. The first 3 days are creative acts of forming and the last 3 days are creative acts of filling.

While many have argued that between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, there must have been some great catastrophe resulting in this state, the Hebrew here simply makes a statement as to its condition. What cannot be inserted here is a long period of time for geological formation and fossils. Romans 5:12 states that death entered
the world through the sin of Adam, so there can be no death on earth until after the fall. The text here is simply describing the state of creation when the account begins and uses words that will give it structure.

Two further words describe its condition. It is a deep in darkness. The deep in Scripture almost always refers to a body of water. While we do not know exactly what was entailed here, Peter assumes and asserts the accuracy of this statement when he says that, “They have deliberately overlooked this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God.” (2 Peter 3:5) Darkness then here is probably not the darkness of evil, but the absence of energy or an animating, uniting Word from God. There is no light.

But this state is not hopeless, for the Spirit of God, the very breath of God in a Person, hovers over the waters in the deep. He is there awaiting the creative Word to speak in order to bring forth what is called out. Before the dawn of light, in the womb of darkness and over the deeps of waters, the Holy Spirit hovers.

Structure – Order and Form

A suitable environment for life is created largely by three acts of division. Each of these creative day periods follows a formula. First, there is the act of God to create, usually His spoken, fiat command. Second, there is the result of His creative command, that which comes into existence. Finally, there is God’s evaluation of what is made through the assignment of its name and character, then a declaration of its being good.

At each creative act, Moses is teaching that God is not only the source and sustainer of all, but He is the meaning-giver, interpreter and judge. Man is not free to assign meaning, create interpretations apart from his accountability to God. Any attempts to do so will constitute rebellion. Thus, when the serpent tempts Eve, he will draw her into independent, rebellious meaning-making and interpreting that results in separation from God.

Day One – Light and Darkness (v.3-5)

The first act of creation is to bring light into existence. God speaks and it is so. At God’s creative word, energy and illumination floods the deep and God causes a division to exist between light and darkness. God then assigns the name to the lit side of the deep calling it Day and the dark side of the deep, calling it Night.

This launches the theme through the battle of the difference between darkness and light. Notice that darkness and night are not created. They are the absence of light, not something having its own existence. In order for there to be dark anywhere, God must divide the light from the dark so that they are distinguishable. We then find all through the Bible that God is spoken of as light and eventually we will return to a day where a visible, physical object as the source of our light will not longer be needed for God is the light of that new heavens, new earth and eternal age.

Notice as well that this first creative day is marked by the passing from evening into day. Thus, either the waters in the deep are rotating or the act of dividing
light from darkness creates a passing from darkness into light, from evening into morning. Thus passes the first day.

Day Two – Space and Earth (v.6-8)
The second creative day act causes the physical universe to come into being. The waters in the deep, now lit on the day side, are divided so that an expanse is created between the waters below and the waters above. This expanse is the universe. The universe is not infinite. It is bounded. It has a circumference. And, it is stretched out. Job 9:8 and Jeremiah 10:12 confirms this “stretching out” of the expanse that creates the sea of space in which God later places all the heavenly bodies. “It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.” [ESV]

The creative act on day two creates space, as we think of it, the universe as a whole. God names this space heaven. The result is a universe at the end of day two that has an outer, bounded edge like a fence and the waters within it that will later be formed into this planet on which we live.

Since the advent of the hypothesis of evolution, people have been scrambling to explain the plain words of Genesis 1 and synthesize them with a pagan philosophy of long, gradual change from simple to complex. There are many points of controversy. Evolution states that there have been billions of years in the cosmos and for the earth. Yet, the text in Genesis 1 uses the Hebrew word for a definite, measurable, marked off time almost always referring to the common idea of a day of light and dark. Further, it reinforces that sense of the passing of a day in its very language: evening and morning.

Some have scoffed at the idea of evening and morning since the sun is not yet in place, at least as the text narrates. I am inclined to take what the Bible says as truth and adjust what I think to fit the text. What is helpful is that a careful reading of verses 14-20 show us that the sun is put in place to divide what all ready exists. So there is day and night before the sun. When the sun comes into existence, it functions as the source of day and demarcation for night.

Day Three – Seas and Land (v.9-13)
Day three is marked as the transition from forming to filling. There are two distinct creative acts on this day.

First, the seas are separated from the land. The earth is beginning to take on life-sustainable geographical features. The seas are gathered and the land is exposed or raised up. Any attempt to exposit these verses must go to other passages in the Word for light. A 3 phase cosmology is shown in 2 Peter 3:4-13. This is derived from the three phrases "the world at that time", "the present heavens and earth", and the "new heavens and earth".

The world that existed from the creation to the flood was much different in many respects to that which we see today. We will see some of those different features in Genesis 2. Consider the following chart as an analysis of that text.
The Beginning
Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEAVENS &amp; EARTH</th>
<th>FORMED</th>
<th>DESTROYED</th>
<th>FEATURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THEN WAS</td>
<td>Heavens by the Word of God</td>
<td>Was flooded with water</td>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Earth out of water and by water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESENT</td>
<td>By natural process out of the flood</td>
<td>By passing away with a roar, burning up in intense heat, burning up and melting.</td>
<td>fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>but whose key feature is fire.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW</td>
<td>As a result of His promise</td>
<td>Eternal</td>
<td>righteousness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second creative act is to bring forth vegetation. Here God is creating the first living thing. We know that it is living in that it reproduces. It has its own kind or unique reproductive type and its seed. These included grasses, flowers and trees. It is clear in the text that God designed boundaries for the types of living things. Biblically, each type is unique because it is able to reproduce of its own kind. Packed into the genetic code is both amazing capacity for diversification and unbridgeable natural barriers.

Some would say that the creation of plant life before the sun means they could not have possibly survived. Two answers to that objection. First, they only have to survive through the night or between 8 – 12 hours until the next sunrise. And further, light is already present even though the sun has not yet been created. The planet is warm and lit. Otherwise either God is foolish in His design work or the text is inaccurate and unreliable. Neither is acceptable.

So, we have an environment initially suitable for living things with the establishment of the seas, land masses and their respective systems. And life surges over the face of the planet called forth in glorious array by the Word of God. Now, we have God’s evaluation: He sees and announces that it is good. It is good in the perfection of its design and implementation and in its moral rightness in God’s order. The original creation was a perfect expression of God’s wisdom and in perfect harmony with God’s will.
Inhabitants – Fullness and Fruitfulness (v.14-31)

Now that God has brought order and form to the cosmos, He begins to fill each environment with its proper occupants. It is important to note that this whole chapter has a “from the earth” view. It is the forming and filling creative works of God as seen from our vantage point on earth. This is not to say that the earth is the center of the cosmos structurally or physically. However, it is the center of God’s redemptive purposes and history.

Day Four – Dwells in Space and Heavens (v.14-19)

On the fourth day, God fills the cosmos with stars and the near heavens with the sun and moon. While nothing is said about the other heavenly bodies like the planets, it is safe to assume that they come into existence on this day.

God begins by creating the sun and moon. The sun’s primary function is to demarcate the day and night. The presence of the sun and moon as well as the rotation of the earth on a tilted axis and revolution of the earth around the sun cause seasons to exist on the earth. The locations of the sun and moon will mark hours, days, months and years. Their location, as well as that of the stars, is determined by God for earth centered reasons. God placed everything where He intended for how it would be seen from earth.

Some object that the text is arguing for a geo-centric universe. Again, this may not be so structurally as though the earth were at the center of physical space. However, clearly the Bible is saying that the sun, moon, stars and heavenly bodies are where they are for earth-centric reasons.

Some also object that it takes millions and millions of years for light to reach the earth from a star. The answer to that is both textual and scientific. First, since God put them there to be seen from earth and Adam would have looked up and seen stars, then the light from the stars would have been created with its path already reaching the earth. Scientifically, there are models of the universe that argue that it is much smaller than assumed and show that light travels faster when not in the presence of gravity. Some of what is just accepted and taught as popular scientific facts are not so factual nor provable after all.

We should simply say, in agreement with the Bible, that God created the sun, moon and stars so that they can be seen from earth on day four and all very good. As the earth turns and the sun sets on day four, it is evening and then it is morning and the day is done.

Day Five – Dwells in the Seas and Sky (v.20-23)

During day five, the seas and skies are filled with their inhabitants. The seas swarm with the creatures that fill them. The skies are filled with the birds. God’s creative word has made the earth lush with vegetation on day four. That creative word brings forth abundance in both number and variety of creatures to swim and creatures to fly.

Now to the next level of living creature and kind, God gives a command to be fruitful and multiply. Plants are engineered for reproduction and are dependent on their environment not their initiative for multiplication. This category of crea-
ture now must take initiative to reproduce and multiply. And they do so. What we tend to think of as animal instinct is really the internal poise of animal creatures to obey the creating and commanding word of God.

Now that we have creatures who can and do obey, we find the first instance of blessing. God blesses all obedient creatures. This grand theme of the Bible is launched right here. Since we are on this side of both the fall and the cross, this has an ominous and a hopeful tone.

So evening comes and dusk settles on the rushing of sleek creatures through the seas and song of birds in the skies. The lushness of seas and earth is filled with the blessed abundance of fish and fowl.

**Day Six – Dwells in the Earth and Garden (v.24-31)**

The final day of creative activity brings to completion God’s marvelous design. The focus is on the creation of human beings as the pinnacle of creation to have dominion over the creation under the beneficent hand of a Sovereign Creator.

**The Creation of Animals**

Briefly, on day six, God brought into existence those animals over whom man will mostly closely rule and depend. Most of these creatures have a level of self-awareness that allows for some level of interaction and communion. The account here clearly separates the category of beast from the category of human. Animals will reproduce after their kind and humans after their image.

One important word: all the kinds of living creatures that have been fossilized, were created on days five and six and were descendents from them. All of the great dinosaurs that roamed the earth did so in the long years between the creation and Noah’s great flood.

**Making of Humans**

Now we come to the point of the creation narrative. God has been forming and filling so as to bring onto the scene, humanity. These two paragraphs and the verse of lyrics between them are dense with truth which we will need to hover over for a moment.

_GOD IS A PLURALITY OF ONE (v.26)_. Our word for this is Trinity. Here is God speaking to Himself and among His persons. It is one God who speaks as “Let us make man in our image.” It is a single God, a single image but a plurality of persons. Thus God Himself is a community of holy love and glorious communion in the interaction among the Persons of the Godhead.

_MAN IS A CREATED REPLICA OF GOD (v.26)_. This is simply what it means to be in God’s image. Quite simply, if God were to become created, man is the result. This begins to point us to a day when God will become man in the Incarnation. This image is what makes man unique from the animals. We are not creatures – we are humans because we are the stamp, the replica of God. And, because we are made, we are not deity. We cannot and do not bear the transcendent attributes of God. Yet it includes such elements as righteousness, lost in the fall and restored in Christ (Colossians 3:10).
**GOD HAS PLACED THE EARTH UNDER MAN’S DOMINION (V.26).** The sovereign rule of God over all was to be reflected in the regency of man over the world. He would rule, not as a god, but as God’s representative and regent. The trajectory of this grand human regency, according to Psalms and Hebrews, reaches its fulfillment and culmination in Christ.

**MALE AND FEMALE ARE EQUALLY IMAGE-BEARERS (V.27).** Contra so many false and pagan religions and the functional theology of some Christians, not just males (or in some cases, females) are God’s image bearers. This is not to say that God is some sort of transgender male-female. In fact, just the opposite is true. God is normally represented in the bible in masculine terms. Jesus Christ Himself is male. This is here to be sure that women are honored as image-bearers in their natural equality with men. The roles in which headship and submission function, emerge in Genesis 2.

**MAN NEEDS GOD’S COUNSEL AND COMMAND ALWAYS (V.28-30).** God here defines and declares to man his relationships, his roles, his responsibilities and his restraints. Man does not have to investigate to discover truth to live. He receives from God sufficient and authoritative revelation by which he is to interpret his world, his existence and life. Perfect humans in a perfect world still need God’s word, His counsel, command and wisdom, to live rightly.

**MAN LIVES IN AND IS BLESSED BY THE BOUNTY OF GOD (V.28-31).** God abundantly provides for man’s work and food. He is blessed by God both in his dependence on God and in God’s delight in him.

Verse 31 shows us God admiring the work of His hand and announcing now that it is all not only good, but very good. When man is in right relationship to God, to others and to the world he is responsible for, then all is very good. Hearing this text in the midst of fallenness points Israel and every eye of faith forward to the day when the Lord Jesus Christ, in perfect holy righteous relationship with His Father, His people and a restored created order, in that day all will be oh so very, very good.

**Sabbath – Completion and Rest (2:1-3)**

Just briefly, verses 1-3 of chapter two are the end of the first narrative. Here we are brought to God entering the rest of a finished work.

**Form and Fill Completed (v.1)**

In this way, God formed and filled and finished all that He has made, all the host of them. Creation stood complete from the heaven’s throne to the earth’s first man and woman. The evening of the sixth day was passed and the dawning of the seventh arose on a holy, harmonious cosmos singing and showing the stunning greatness of God.

**Rest and Reward Enjoyed (v.2-3)**

On the seventh day God rests or ceases from all His work. He rests, not because He is tired or weary. He rests because His work, His labor is completed. Rest will result when it is finished. The seventh day itself is blessed by God and made
holy. Here is the first instance of that word. A day of rest is approved of and delighted in by God through being set aside and made distinct. Here is the Sabbath rest of creation. What will follow in chapter three will destroy that rest and set God back to work until on a dark day on Golgotha, the Redeemer will finish the work of salvation.

For a people laboring under the weight of sin and the wilderness wanderings of chastening and correction, there is a weekly reminder that all is not well, but it will not remain so. There will come a day, when all the redeemed will enter the rest of a restored creation. And the glories of that day will be greater than the glories of these verses for then, the mighty mercies and grace of God will be on display in the community of the redeemed gathered at the feet of their Redeemer and Ruler.

**Conclusion**

What can I say then in conclusion? O, as I will oft through this series, to point you to Jesus.

All the cosmos is from, by, and for Christ. - Colossians 1:16-17

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. [ESV]

The cosmos was made by Christ - John 1:1-3

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. [ESV]

The cosmos is upheld by Christ - Hebrews 1:3

> ...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. [ESV]

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 [ESV]
Introduction

It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.

For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.
How great are your works, O LORD!
Your thoughts are very deep!
Psalm 92:1-5

I want us to sing for joy over Genesis 2. I wish it were in my power to unfold for you the greatness of what is here. I pray that in explanation there will also be exhilaration. God’s mighty work brought all things into existence by the wisdom of His knowledge, by the word of His power, by fashioning of His hand and all very good. We ended chapter one with God at rest in the completion of His work.

Moses, through the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit now goes back and expands on the account. This account focuses on the details of a portion of day six. Some have thought that this account contradicts chapter one; we do not believe so. Chapter one is a wide angle, long lens view of creation. Chapter two is a close up of day six and a portion of that day, at that. Rather than approaching the text looking for contradictions, we should approach the text expecting expansion and explanation.

The Tol*Dot opening of this section (v.4) gives us the first two generations on the earth. It covers from the creation of Adam to the beginning of spiritual searching in days of Seth. These two generations will launch the course of human history and the redemptive story line.

The drama of this chapter unfolds here in two scenes. The first shows the provision by God for man in his place to live. The second shows the provision by God of his spouse to love. We have the garden and the companions.
The Garden (v.5-17)

Redemptive history begins in a garden and ends in a city. There is movement from man dwelling in the Garden of Eden with God to God dwelling in the City of Zion with man. This is one of the trajectories and themes of the Bible. From the Garden they will be expelled but into Zion God’s people will come and all the people groups will stream up to it.

Its Surrounding Circumstances (v.5-7)

As to the General Environment (v.5-6)

This paragraph describes the general conditions on the earth when God created man. The earth had produced grasses, plants and trees, but they were wild and un-cultivated. What is being referred to in verse five as the bush and the small plant of the field is difficult. Whatever had not sprung up yet needed the cultivating hand of man. The reason as Moses gives it is that the world before the flood was very different.

The world then apparently was not watered from the atmosphere as it is now. The difference in temperatures across the earth, the evaporation of water from the oceans and the movement of the air currents cause moisture in the air to be carried to different places and then to fall as rain. The world before the flood had a different system. The great waters that were stored in the deep fed springs and rivers. These provided mists that rose up during the evenings and dew in the mornings sufficient to sustain life. From the evidence all over the world, the earth before the Flood was almost universally tropical or subtropical. There appears to be a uniform temperature all over the earth. This may have come about because of the presence of what is referred to as the “vapor canopy”.

The vapor canopy theory has some support from the Scripture and helps explain many things about the pre-flood world. This canopy would have been a clear water canopy probably located where the ionosphere is now. It would have provided a uniform greenhouse effect and shielded the inhabitants of the earth from some of the life-shortening harmful rays from the sun.

As to the Creation of Man (v.7)

Moses expands on how Adam was made. Chapter one tells us about the design of humans in relationship to his spiritual environment. Chapter two tells us the fabrication of man, that is, Adam, in relationship to his physical environment. We have already seen from chapter one that we are not animals. We have been made in image of God. These two phrases here teach us several important truths about how God made us and what we are as humans.

We have a physical part, called our bodies. Our bodies are how we interact with the physical world God has made. Our bodies are made of earth and will return to earth. There will be a day when God will refashion the bodies of His saints so that they will both be uniquely their own and fully conformed to the intent of God’s original design.
WE HAVE AN IMMATERIAL PART, CALLED OUR SOULS. While not mentioned here directly, the rest of the Bible teaches us that we have a soul, sometimes using words like heart and spirit to refer to components of our immaterial part.

WE ARE A UNITY OF PARTS. Understand this. The real you is both your body and your soul. I have tried to get away from saying the real you that is in your body. The Bible teaches us that the body and soul are wholly integrated together into the “you” yet they are distinguishable. Again, even in this there is a reflection of God and an anticipation of the incarnation.

GOD GIVES MAN HIS LIFE. Now what this different is that God breathes into inanimate flesh so that Adam becomes a living creature. This life giving breath causes Adam to awaken to life from the very mouth of God. This theme then runs through the Bible: God’s breath, His Spirit and His Word, causes us to come alive. In our spiritual fleshiness and deadness, the Word and Spirit quicken.

MAN IS THE DIRECT CREATION BY GOD. We are not the product of long evolutionary change from lower species to a higher order. Adam (and later Eve) were made directly by God. They were made mature; that is, they were full grown on the first day of their existence. Contra almost every other theory, philosophy, myth and religion, man is made and made immediately and directly by God.

From this, I want to make one more observation. We noted it last week, but I want to highlight it now. When God made the universe, He made it mature, full-grown. Some have called this “with the appearance of age.” It is evident from the Genesis record and the complementary texts throughout the Bible that this is so.

Its Divine Creation

Into the uncultivated wilderness and with the man now made, God sets about to plant a Garden. The Garden was designed by God as a separate place from the general wilderness and uncultivated chaos of the earth. From it man was to learn how to extend his dominion into the rest of creation. And her God provided all that man needed for food in the garden.

God placed two important trees in the Garden. These trees are very important for the flow of redemptive history. Let’s take just a moment to consider them.

The Tree of Life – No explanation is given as to what kind of tree this is. It was a tree that gave life. Later, we will find that it could have been the source of sustaining life indefinitely. In the new heavens and earth, it is a multi-fruited tree associated with the river of life in Zion and the throne of God for the healing and life of all the people groups. From my own study of the Word the tree of life represents the Lord Jesus, who is the source of everlasting life.

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil – Again, we do not know what kind of tree, but it was placed in the garden to be that which would be forbidden in God’s testing of man. It is through the commands relating to that tree that the experience of good and evil would come.
We do not know what the function of these trees would have been if man had not fallen. We know that they are important to the storyline of the Bible as it unfolds in fallenness.

**Its Strategic Centrality** (v.10-14)

I was struck by two things this week in my study.

The Garden is not named Eden. Eden is the place where God dwelled on earth before the flood. The Garden is in its environs. The wealth and importance of kings were often measured by the greatness and grandness of the gardens they planted near their residences. Thus, this wonderful Garden is the place where man will dwell near the dwelling of God.

The Garden is watered by the river out of Eden. Notice carefully verse 10. Out of Eden, God’s dwelling, flowed a river to be the source of the Garden’s life. That river then branched off at the Garden into the four great rivers of the Fertile Crescent. Thus, the river from Eden flowing through the garden becomes the source of blessing and sustenance to the rest of the world.

So the point in this paragraph is not to locate the Garden geographically. It is possible that it may do that, but the earth has been changed so radically by the flood that the Garden’s location then by present day rivers is unlikely. No, the point here is metaphorical. Eden, God Himself in His dwelling place, pours a river into the Garden out of which comes the flow of blessing for all the earth.

**Its Related Commands** (v.15-17)

For the first time we are introduced to the elements of what later in Scripture are covenants. I believe that a good Biblical theology should reserve the word covenant in its formal sense for the covenant with Noah.

Is there a covenant here with Adam? Yes. God sovereignly places Adam in the Garden to live. He assigns Adam two responsibilities and announces one restriction. Here is God giving the terms of Adam’s life and well-being. Man may be a regent who is to extend God’s dominion over the earth. However, he is not God and must serve under and be submissive to the rule of God.

**As to Adam’s Responsibilities** (v.15)

Adam’s responsibilities are defined in two simple words. Yet there is enormous potential for living out his identity as given him and defined for him by God.

**HE IS TO WORK THE GARDEN.** The idea here is all the labor that would be put into learning, understanding, and applying the pattern of order that God placed into the Garden.

**HE IS TO KEEP THE GARDEN.** The idea here is all the labor that would be put into maintaining the Garden as a steward under God. Adam was responsible to preserve the order that God had created.

These two words, work and keep, are used all through the Old Testament to refer to spiritual service. So man’s physical work is invested with spiritual
importance. This breaks the secular/sacred dichotomy showing that from the beginning, man was to work and to ward under God’s rule.

**As to Adam’s Restriction (v.16-17)**

Here is the first time in the Bible we find the word “command”. In the context of unimaginable bounty and blessing, with all that God had provided in the Garden and in the wider world for food, only this certain tree was not to be eaten from. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the place of testing. There was nothing innate in the tree itself either to give a knowledge of good or a knowledge of evil. It was obedience to God that was in question.

In other words, God did not deny them the tree because it was dangerous. He denied them the tree as probation, a test. There already are responsibilities for man. But God’s decreed will and sovereign purpose placed this tree in the Garden, commanded Adam not to eat as a means by which the fall could take place.

Now I want to be clear about this. The course of redemptive history was not set *after the fall*. We are not living out Plan B. Everything that is being done in Genesis 1-2 is designed by God to bring us to Genesis 3 and Adam and Eve’s fall into sin. How can I say that? Because all through the Bible, God declares His intention to show aspects of His character which can only be manifested in the context of sin. In other words, God is merciful. But if there are no creatures needing mercy, then it is only something that can be talked about, but never expressed. So God had determined to show all these grand attributes and to put them on public display by all that He would do to save His people.

Note: One implication of this is to refuse to speculate over what if Adam had not sinned. As I read the Bible, this was not a possible world. The original creation, the Garden itself, and the trees placed there were there, not to provide two possible paths for the future, but to make the determined path possible.

So God has provided for Adam, a place to live, food to eat, responsibilities as servant-king, direction and a pattern for dominion and clear commands and warnings about consequences.
The Companions
(v.18-25)

But, something is amiss…

The Evident Need
(v.18-20)

For the first time in the text, something is not good. God, who in His Trinity of Persons and singleness of essence is a community of love, fellowship and oneness, declares that it is not good for man to be alone. If God dwells in community and companionship, then man cannot dwell alone. So God declares that He will make a companion, a helper, who will be a good fit. He will design a perfect helper to be a companion for Adam.

In chapter one, we are told that God choose to make human kind in His image. Here is the basis for equality. All humans are equal as image bearers. God also choose to make human kind, male and female. Here is the basis for roles and responsibilities. Now in chapter two, we are shown the process of these creative acts of God. Adam is made from the ground, placed in the Garden and given his servant-king task in life. Now, God will complete the making of human kind by making the woman, Eve.

But God was to teach Adam a practical and personal lesson. Adam is surrounded by heart fulfilling creation. Part of the creation is all the animal life. He needs to see and feel his incompleteness. So God assigns Adam a project. In essence the project is: find a suitable companion mate for yourself. In order to do that intelligently, search through all the animal kingdom by examining them, categorizing and characterizing them, giving them suitable names. In this important task, Adam is beginning to fulfill his dominion mandate. He is also on a search for God’s kind of companionship.

Verse 20 comes to the end of the task. In all the creation, no one is a suitable companion for him. He is alone in his humanness. This is not as a result of sin in earth or fault in God. This is his place now in God’s order. No animal can or ought to be the sort of companion that God has ordained in human community.

The Wonderful Provision
(v.21-23)

Now that Adam understands, God moves to provide that suitable helper-companion. God causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep. While he is asleep, God removes a portion of his side, here called his rib. Then God closes up his surgical site. From this flesh and bone removed from Adam God builds the first woman, Eve. While Adam is made from the dust of the earth, the woman is made from the flesh of the man. And God brings her to Adam.

Why does God go about this as He does? Why does He not simply make Eve from the dust at the same time He made Adam? And why from Adam’s side? Lot’s of sentimental reasons have been proposed. But what is God’s point? Let me suggest some answers grounded in the tapestry and trajectory of the text.

Eve being made after Adam has been created and made the regent, establishes who is head of the human race and the home. It is clear that Adam is responsible before God for his rule and his obedience before Eve is made. Yet, she shares a subordinate oversight with him.
Adam needs to learn not to have substitute companions. He must be satisfied with God even when there is no Eve. And he must not substitute other companions in the place of Eve. He needs to sense his dependence on God and his incompleteness without Eve.

This reflects the mysterious reality of Christ and the church. The church is formed out of and as a part of the Christ’s body. Her existence and life comes from Christ. The correspondence between Adam’s rib and Jesus’s riven side may be significant as well.

Verse 23 simply sings with the delight of Adam. Frankly, I think that Adam “saying” this is a serious understatement. In the Hebrew, this is poetry. He recognizes her as one with him. He rejoices that she is wonderfully and fearfully made by the great Creator. He resonates with her as God’s gift of marriage to him for their mutual oneness and companionship. He names her as being all that God intended: a suitable companion and marvelous completer.

So what was sought has now been provided. Adam and Eve, joint image bearers of their creator, companions and completers are now united by God in a covenant union.

The Scriptural Lessons (v.24-25)

The Holy Spirit through Moses now draws two very important lessons from this text.

God has established the institution of marriage (v.24) He is its designer. He has defined it and implemented it. True marriage is the complete union of one man and one woman in a covenant bond to serve God’s purposes. In marriage, physical union is not only permitted, but commanded. The physical union is to be an expression of the union and communion of souls.

Where there is no sin, there can be no shame (v.25). Here are Adam and Eve living naked and open, unashamed in the presence of their God and in the presence of one another. That nakedness and openness exists because there is no sin and they are married. There is nothing to cause guilt and shame. They are in a right relationship with one another and with their God.
What a incredibly amazing chapter. So much mystery and wonder. So much delight and joy. Here is God providing for man all that he needs. Yet woven into all that God is doing is a preparation for the unfolding of His purposes for mercy and grace.

As we close, consider the following important lessons: (drawn from The New Bible Commentary)

**Conclusion**

**GOD HAS ORDAINED THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MAN.** We are accountable to Him in worship, work and walk. We are not autonomous and independent. We were designed by God to keep His Word and to obey it.

**A HUSBAND AND WIFE COMPLEMENT AND COMPLETE EACH OTHER.** Thus the differences in physiology are reflected in their souls as well. Difference and diversity are desirable. It is like the interlocking of the fingers of the hand. Yet, at the very points of where our differences are to make us stronger, they often are the places for conflict.

**THE UNION BETWEEN MAN AND WIFE SHOULD BE PERMANENT.** A man is united (lit. ‘sticks’) to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Jesus (Mt. 19:5) and Paul (Eph. 5:31) quote this in decrying divorce. This verse is the foundation for a Biblical view of marriage. In every case where a wrong view or practice of marriage is being corrected, this verse is quoted.

**A HUSBAND MUST PUT HIS WIFE’S INTEREST ABOVE ALL OTHERS,** even his parents. He will leave his father and mother, by putting his responsibility to honor and to care for them second to his delightful duty to care for and nourish his wife’s well-being (cf. Eph. 5:25–29).

**THE WIFE IS UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF HER HUSBAND.** Adam names her woman (23) and later Eve (3:20), just as earlier he had named the animals (19). This concept of the man’s headship is taken from this account and is woven throughout the rest of the Bible.

**GOD CREATED ONLY ONE EVE FOR ADAM,** not several Eves or another Adam. Thus, both polygamy (cf. Lv. 18:18; Dt. 17:17) and homosexuality (Lv. 18:22; Rom. 1:26–27) are condemned by the Scripture and corrupt the marvelous design and delight of the Word of God.¹

Finally, the Lord Jesus Christ delights in and desires for His Bride, the church. In Ephesians 5:32, marriage is a reflection of a greater reality and more wonderful mystery. Make it your aim to reflect that great reality for glory of God.

The Fall: Introduction of Sin

Genesis 3

Introduction
What do we do when the Bible sounds like Aesop’s fables? Behold, here is a talking snake! We accept the account as true because it is in the Word. This is no fable; this is fact. This is not a children’s story about silliness; it is the horrific beginning of sin.

Let’s stay connected to the flow here by looking at how Moses develops the theme of sin.

Chapter 3 – Fall: The Introduction of Sin
Chapter 4 – Brothers: The Escalation of Sin
Chapters 5-6 – Corruption: The Spread of Sin
Chapter 7-8 – Flood: The Judgment on Sin

Israel and all of us are to learn what Paul teaches in Romans 1; man will reject God and embrace sin in ever increasing expressions of depravity with God handing them over to the corruption and consequences of their sin.

It will begin in Genesis 3 when Adam, the head of the human race, disobeys God and plunges the whole human race into depravity and death.

The Commencement of Sin (v.1-7)
The shift from the innocence of the Adam and Eve to the crafty serpent marks an ominous turn in the story. It is carried by the sound of the similarities of the Hebrew words for “naked” and for “crafty”. Adam and Eve are vulnerable and Satan is vile.

The Person of the Tempter (v.1)
The serpent is introduced with attributes that are more than animal. This is a particular serpent. Here is deceit and evil craftiness as the embodiment of evil. Here is someone in the snake. The serpent, not just as a part of the animal creation, but as a part of the rebellious and fallen heavenly hosts, is an ever growing menace through the Scriptures. So while a talking snake sounds fairytale like, it tells us two very important things.

➢ There is more going on here than just an animal tempting Eve. There is a malevolent intelligence, an evil presence who uses the snake as his tool. The serpent here is not to be equated with modern, crawling reptiles. What we see today is the product of the curse. The clear implication here is that the serpent had legs, a dragon beautiful and superbly intelligent. Eve does not see the serpent as either strange or sinister.

➢ Satan never appears as he is. He is always parading as something or someone else. He even pretends to be an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) when he is in fact a fallen cherub and full of darkness and deceit (Ezekiel 28:14, 16).
Here is the introduction of competing voices. God’s Word and counsel have been the sole guide for Adam and Eve. Their world is not only made by God, but their understanding of that world is entirely shaped by God. Since one of the persons of the Godhead is Word, Satan attacks humans by perverting and twisting what was to be their life and substitutes his own dark lies. This is what we face today. Even though we have the grand clarity and sufficiency of the Word of God, we can be overwhelmed with a cacophony of compelling, but corrupt counsel.

The Presentation of the Temptation  
(v.2-6)

In these verses, Moses establishes a clear understanding of how sin functions. Notice that Satan tempts Eve through the way God has made her soul to function. There is no sin nature driving this or being appealed to. This is temptation aimed squarely at her heart, at how it believes and wants.

Through Lies Directed at the Heart Beliefs  
(v.2-5)

The temptation is first presented directly through lies aimed at the part of Eve’s soul which knows and believes. Also note the chiastic structure here.

Satan questions God’s Word  
(v.1)

He undermines its accuracy and authority. The questioning is two-fold.

- Did God actually say it? Is Eve really sure that what she believes is what God said? Is the Word she has, accurate? The question intends to shake Eve’s confidence in what Adam has taught and told her. Is the voice of counsel she has been following really telling her the way it is?

- Are you, Eve, included in this prohibition (due to the plural pronoun)? Was this prohibition for Adam only so that she is exempted? Is the Word she has, authoritative? The question may be including Adam’s standing by in the plural. It also may be insinuating that while the command was given to Adam, it may be good for him, but not Eve.

This line of attack is used over and over again. We are challenged with whether we have the Word in our hands. We are often tempted to think that what it is saying isn’t applicable to us. I hear this all the time in counseling through sentences like, “Well that is just your interpretation;” and “I don’t think that text applies to my situation.”

Eve changes God’s Word  
(v.2-3)

She undermines its scope and sufficiency. Her quoting of God’s Word here is inaccurate by both taking away and adding to. The affect is to change what she believes to be true about God.

- She leaves out “freely” and “all” thus making God less gracious.
- She adds “neither touch it” thus making God more restrictive.
- She leaves out “surely”, making God less serious about judgment.
I am struck by the fact that she knows enough to respond to Satan with the Word of God. But she is not holding the line. She is not getting it right. She goes above the line by adding to the Word and below the line by taking away from the Word. Thank God for Jesus in the wilderness temptation who not only uses the Word of God to ward off temptation, but He gets it right and uses it right. Jesus holds the line when everyone else, including Eve and Adam here, fail.

**Satan challenges God’s Word**  
(v.4-5)

He attacks God’s integrity and intention. Satan now declares that what God has said is simply not true. He does not challenge the precept itself, only its punishment.

- He attacks God’s *INTEGRITY*. He effectively says that God has lied. It is simply not true that you will surely die.

- He attacks God’s *INTENTION*. He also imputes evil motives to God. God has given this command in order to keep you down, to keep you below Him and beneath Him.

Notice that this attack is aimed at what God knows and what God intends. His slander of God is framed by the God’s own heart functions. God has not spoken the truth because God wants to preserve His unique deity and not grant equal status to anyone.

Here is the heart of Satan and the underlying sin in all sin. Satan wants to be equal with or just be God. And so do we. At the root of sin is self. At the root of self is the deceit and desire to be like God. In our desire to be like Him in idolatrous ways, we mar the very holy and righteous ways we are like Him as image bearers.

Do you see how these are lies and deceits aimed at getting Eve to agree with Satan and to believe what is not true so that she will act on them? This is part of why you do what you do. You believe certain things to be true and that belief causes actions (as well as emotions, affections).

**Through Lusts Directed at the Heart Wants**  
(v.6)

Now the temptation moves to present an attraction through lusts to the heart desires.

**Temptation appeals through a physical medium, sees.**

Most temptations are presented through the medium of the body. It is not that the body is evil, but that it is how the soul interacts with the world around it. Satan speaks, Eve hears. The tree is pointed to, Eve sees. Her heart is engaged with the temptation as enticement using the body.

Many temptations are to the misuse of legitimate things. There is nothing wrong with eating. But there is everything wrong with eating this fruit. Nothing is evil in and of itself. But almost everything has an evil misuse.
Temptation appeals to the wants of the heart, desires.

She is driven by her craving, desires and wants. She is going to trade desiring all the rest of the food and fruit of the garden to desire the one fruit she is forbidden. If she does not desire it, she will not take it. But she reaches out following the flow of her desires to take and eat.

Her believing Satan’s lie shapes the object of her desires. The tree is not truly desirable to make one wise, but it is what Satan has said. Her wants are directed to what is false, deceived by Satan’s lies. They deceive her into thinking this is a greater pleasure than all the legitimate ones God has given. Prizing this fruit more than the others causes her to crave, to be mastered by her desire for her.

Temptation appeals in thematic heart elements.

Notice that the fruit is delicious, delightful and desirable. It is good to eat. It is lovely and beautiful. It will bring me something I do not have now. The thematic heart elements have at their core pleasures and promises. Temptations hold out to the desires phony pleasures and false promises. Can you see in your own temptations how they appeal by presenting to you some sort of pleasure or promising you something desirable? Can you see how often they are substitutes for the true pleasures and promises God holds out for us?

Now, be clear on this: desiring is simply a function of the heart. It is not possible to “not want”. But those wants, desires and cravings are to be shaped by truth and submitted to God. Now we watch what Eve believes linked with what Eve sees turn her desires against her to crave what God has forbidden. In the midst of sin, an important question is, “What did you want?”

I want you to see some important implications here:

- Your wants are shaped by what you believe to be true. Notice the movement here. Satan must first change what she believes before her wants begin to master her. This is why faith, knowledge and wisdom are the most essential ingredients for holiness.
- Your wants and desires are carried about in words. You want in words. We know what we want through the words that express and carry those wants.
- You are responsible to control and change your wants. You are not at the mercy of the pull of vague, inward tuggings called wants. Your wants are your responsibility.

James explains this when he writes in James 1:14-16, God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. John warns us out of this text when he writes in 1 John 2:15-17, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.
The Product of the Temptation (v.7)
What are the results of the temptation?

**Sin Resulting from Disobedience**
Eve takes and eats. She disobeys God by believing Satan’s lies and desiring what is forbidden. Deceived, she disobeys.

Adam takes and eats. It is clear to me that in the words, “gives to Adam who was with her,” that he is standing there watching this happen. He is with her. He is not deceived. He chooses Eve over God. He chooses to disobey. This single act of disobedience takes the whole human race down with him.

**Shame Resulting from Guilt**
They are aware of their sin. Satan said their eyes would be opened. They are opened, but not to what they expected. The poison of sin in their souls now changes how they see what they see.

They are ashamed of their sin. Their knowledge now of evil is the root, the cause of the emotion called shame. Their holy simplicity is now corrupted by guilty shame.

This knowledge of good and evil they now know is not Godlike. Their experience has not made them into gods. It has exposed them as visible and vulnerable and needing to be covered because of sin and guilt.

The Confrontation of Sin (v.8-13)
I cannot help but think that verse 8 is immediately after verses 6-7. Here they are, startled in the first moments of their sin and shame, by the sound of the Lord God in His presence moving in the Garden.

**Engages through Relationship** (v.8)
This paragraph opens with words that convey fellowship and relationship. God engages Adam and Eve in a relationship with them. He comes to where they are to meet with them and fellowship with them. He confronts them out of a context of his communion with them. This encourages us as we want to counsel others to do so with a love, know speak, and do engagement. Build relationship, understand issues, represent God’s agenda for change and give practical steps of action.

God initiates an active pursuit of the sinner. God is the seeker and man is runner. God knows that Adam and Eve have sinned. He is not coming into the Garden just to have a time of fellowship. He is coming in the time of fellowship to confront them with their sin. He is seeking them. They are hiding from God. This is ever the way it is – no one seeks after God first; He is always first in seeking man.

Sin destroys the relationship breaking fellowship through fear and folly. The hiding and running from the Presence of God is a graphic picture of a broken rela-
tionship. How sin causes us to cower in fear. When they ought to be moving toward God in loving delight, they are running and hiding in shame.

Sin destroys one’s ability to see clearly, contrary to what was promised in the temptation. Here is the insanity and irrationally, the madness sin causes. How is Adam going to hide from omniscience? Where will Adam run from omnipresence? The most blinding effect of sin is that we are blind to it.

**Exposes through Questions (v.9-13)**

God exposes Adam and Eve through questions. God is not asking in order to learn what He does not know. He is asking penetrating questions in order to give Adam self-knowledge. The soul is poised to answer questions even if the answer is not spoken out loud. God causes Adam and Eve to face their own sin by exposing it through carefully crafted questions aimed to expose the heart.

Notice the categories of questions:

- **Questions around broken relationships (v.9-10)**
  
  These are questions that ask the “Where are you” around life and life’s relationships. They are designed to show how sin alienates and turns friends into enemies, love into fear, walking with one another into running and hiding from one another.

- **Questions examining evidences of guilt (v.11a)**
  
  These are questions which probe how guilt is working itself out. They are designed to expose the foolish words of counsel, the fake pleasures and false promises. It exposes our exposure.

- **Questions about the facts of sin (v.11b-12)**
  
  These are questions that gather data about what one did or how one responded. It is meant to get the story straight. They are direct, centering on the precepts. Did you do? Did you say? What happened? It makes the response of Adam even more terrible that in the face of the great wonderful Counselor he attempts to deflect the questions and shift blame.

- **Questions requiring self-accusation (v.13).**
  
  These are questions which draw out admission of sin. They are designed to expose how one is culpable and how one has contributed. They help us see us as being responsible, responsible for our own sin and responsible for being the means to tempt, provoke, contribute, be the occasion of someone else’s sin.

For all of us as brothers and sisters, or in our roles as spouses or parents, or in our spheres of relationships in church, home, community or work, here is how we help people change. Our counsel uses God’s kind of questions to help people see. And often they will not. Even here, we find Adam and Eve not repenting when counseled by God Himself.
Look at how Moses relates the universal sinful responses to sin and guilt.

- Denial – We will cover the effects of our sin.
- Escape/Avoid – We will hide from our accusers.
- Blame-shift – We will place blame on others.

Brothers and sisters, this how we tend to respond to having sinned ourselves. We try to cover our sin, to hide from counsel, to shift blame. We refuse the Word of God and the Spirit of God and the people of God. How we need to be humble and receive the grace of God to grant repentance so that we will not respond like Adam and Eve. (Consider 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

The Condemnation of Sin (v.14-19)
In the garden where there had been nothing but blessing, now comes the curse. This is fundamental to understanding the Bible. Blessing depends on obedience. Disobedience will bring the curse. The glory of the gospel is that both the bringing of the blessing we receive, and taking of the curse we deserve, are both in Christ.

The Curse affecting Satan (v.14-15)
In reverse order to the confrontation, God announces the curse upon the Serpent. The curse in condemnation has both the physical and spiritual element. The tool of Satan suffers and Satan himself is condemned. The dragon will become a snake, demoted in his position in the animal kingdom crawling on his belly, sucking dirt.

This also is part of Satan’s condemnation. His place of honor has been brought down and he is confined to earth. Make no mistake, he may be prince and power of the air, not because God has ceded regency over the earth to Satan’s usurpation. No, he is roaming and ruling his present prison. He is chained here. He is a bully here. He is a dust-eater.

Finally, Satan is promised his eternal damnation. He will surely die. All the way down through redemptive history until the Redeemer comes, there is a war of descendents. We will see this beginning to be worked out in the next chapter. There will be enmity, war and hatred that will culminate in an offspring. Satan will cause a heel bruise. But that Offspring of the woman will bring down a deadly head blow.

Now be careful. This is not a promise to Eve. God is not talking to Eve. He is talking to Satan. This is a promise that prophecies doom for Satan. But in promising condemnation to eternal death and doom for Satan, there arises hope and help for sinful man.
The Curse affecting Eve  

(v.16)

God turns to deal with Eve. The curse for her disobedience will have two terrible affects.

She will suffer in her childbearing. That in which she will be most fulfilled as she carries out her role and function in the world, she will have pain. The pains of childbearing are meant to remind us of our sin. Sin’s consequence and curse will embed even the obedience of being fruitful and multiplying with pain.

She will strive in her home. Why do I say that? The language here “you shall desire” and “he shall rule” is the exact same words and construction as in Genesis 4:7. Sin desired to master Cain, but he was to rule over it if he was to do well. So the word desire here is neither referring to sexual desire nor to submission. Part of the consequence and curse of sin is that she will desire to master her husband. Sin will drive a lack of submission and an attempt to assert control. And she will suffer as a result of sin, the domineering control of man.

In counseling, this is an important insight into what is often happening in marriages. Sinfully, the wife is attempting to usurp and assert control. The response of the husband is to ever increasing measures to assert his own authority and control. In some men, the clam-up spin in their sinful natures drives them to the murder of treating their wives as though they are not there. In other husbands the blow-up spin drives them to the murder of abusive words or deeds.

Ephesians 4-5 put this dynamic to death by implementing the relationship between Christ and the church in marriage. The wife’s sinful tendency to dominate is put off and loving, Christ-like submission is to be put on. The husband’s sinful tendency to dominate and dictate is put off and replaced by sacrificially loving leadership. So, in your own marriage, my beloved, which of these cycles or dynamics is being lived out?

The Curse affecting Adam  

(v.17-19)

God grounds Adam’s condemnation in his hearing and heeding false counsel, the voice of his wife. This clearly shows that while Eve disobeys because she prizes the fruit, Adam disobeys because he prizes Eve. He has chosen Eve over God.

So, his delightful tilling of the garden is turned into wearisome toil. The ground is cursed so that it resists him, his cultivating and his dominion. His work will now be hard as a reminder that he is in fact not god, not sovereign. He cannot hear and heed false counsel without dire effects. Every day of difficulty and futility is a reminder that we have sinned and richly deserve the misery we experience. Adam has traded God’s rest in the Garden for hard slave labor in the world. Adam’s sin has brought the whole earth under the curse. It will groan under that weight until the day when the children of God receive their glorified bodies and the creation is restored in the new heavens and new earth (Romans 8:18-25).

 Humanity will die. God’s threat is made good. There is mercy mingled with judgment. They do not return to the dust immediately. They will live together, bear children in pain, sweat over hard work, and long and hope for the great Reversal.
The Consequences of Sin (v.20-24)

Sin has consequences. There are both condemnation and consequences. The consequences of sin are described in this last, sad paragraph.

The Expectation because of Sin (v.20-21)

There will be *future generations*, bringing the redeemer through the woman. Adam hears the promise of pain in childbirth, responding in hope and expectation for the future. She will be the mother of all the living. While there may be pain, there is still a promise. There is a promise of a future seed dealing the enemy a deadly blow and of children through whom that hope will come.

There are *present garments*, covering sin through death. Adam and Eve are given an object lesson. Their human efforts to deal with sin through covering with leaves, are insufficient. God must take an animal, slay it and cover their sin, its guilt and shame. While the text here does not specifically say a lamb or sheep was slain, the rest of the Bible would at least indicate it. God will initiate the sacrifice; will slay it with His own hand. The sins under the Old Covenant will be covered until the final Lamb comes and completes the work of redemption.

The Expulsion because of Sin (v.22-24)

The next consequence

**Driven from the Garden.**

This is an act of mercy. God expels them so as to bring about hope for transformation and renovation. As long as they are in the Garden, they could reach out and take the tree of life and the sentence is not completed. Here is the reason for the expulsion. God has not determined that man will live forever in a lost estate. God has determined that man must die; he must die because of his sin and he must die in order to be delivered from his sin.

And then the phrase, “drove out man”. Does this imply that Adam and Eve went reluctantly? God sent them out verse 23 but then drove them out, verse 24. What a simply awful day!

**Denied access to the Garden**

Here are the cherubim signifying the presence of God. Always in the bible, God’s manifesting Himself to man is accompanied by the cherubim. So here at the east of Eden, God will meet with man while guarding access to the blessings of the Garden.

Here is the sword. Access to the Garden is denied until the Redeemer comes and passes through the sword Himself and becomes the gate instead of the guard. So the way into heaven is closed until the Redeemer comes. Then the sword of wrath severs the life of the Lamb and through death the gate is opened. Until then, men may meet with God. But they meet outside the gate, outside the curtain, outside the Temple. In that meeting with God, the threat of judgment is always hovering and fear dominates. Now that the way is open, men meet with God at the mercy seat in the heart of Eden, in Zion, the city-Temple of God.
Let me close with these challenges to you.

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE WORD OF GOD. Read it carefully. Learn it well. Handle it accurately. Obey it completely. Satan’s surrogates will question its accuracy and authority. You must not add to it or take away from it. You must be clear from it who God is and what He promises and provides.

REJECT ALL FORMS OF FALSE COUNSEL. Eve listened to the quiet, compelling questions and denials of the serpent. Adam listened and obeyed the tempting voice and example of Eve. Eve needed to hold the line and not listen to Satan. Adam needed to hold the line and not listen to Eve. We all need to hold the line of the Scriptures and not listen to false counsel of the world.

WATCH OVER YOUR HEART WITH DILIGENCE. Out of your heart, you act. Out of what you believe and what you want, arise all affections, emotions, choices and actions. Over the patterns of sin in your life, ask the “what was I thinking” questions. What do you believe to be true? What do you want? What appeals to you and why? What pleasures and promises does sin hold out to you that your heart moves toward?

RESPOND IN HUMBLE REPENTANCE WHEN CONFRONTED WITH GODLY COUNSEL. Do not hide your sin, run from counsel or shift blame. We are a culture of skilled blame-shifters. While our families, our childhood, our bodies, our brains, our spouses, our children, our situations, our jobs even our churches may contribute, tempt, test, provoke, be the occasion or the context for sin, they never ever cause sin. Be humble and receive grace to change and grow.

OWN THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN. When you have dealt with sin and repented of sin, be willing to live with its consequences. Rejecting the results of sin often is a sign that there has been worldly sorrow, not godly repentance.

BANK YOUR HOPE ON THE REDEEMER OF OUR SOULS. In the darkness and difficulty of sin, turn to Christ. Turn to Him for salvation. Turn to Him for transformation. You are saved and transformed by a Person, by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies begun in Genesis 3. He is all you need. Trust in Him, O sinners and saints today.
The Brothers: Escalation of Sin

Genesis 4

Introduction

Many of us have followed with some interest two recent murder trials. The Mark Hacking case and Scott Peterson case have filled our news screens over the last months. What has struck me has been the radically different responses to having committed murder. Mark Hacking’s worldly remorse for deceit and murder led to self-pity and bizarre behavior. Scott Peterson has sat with almost disdain for the legal process and the mounting evidence against him. And in some other cases, we have seen murderers complain and charge that the proper legal process of investigation, indictment and trial are simply harassment. The perpetrator is posing as the victim.

As Christians, this sort of attitude and behavior should not surprise us. Perpetrators of crime have posed as victims of the legal process since time began. We recognize that in the account before us today.

The story here is intended to simply continue what has begun in chapter 3. The enmity between the seed, the expulsion out into the cursed earth, the guarded gate where men may meet God, but not enter the Garden are the backdrop for this chapter. Here, sin will escalate from the disobedience in the Garden to murder, rebellion, polygamy and prideful boasting.

The story intends to show how the dazzling wonders of culture began. For Israel leaving Egypt and entering Canaan, for Christians in the 21st Century, it is instructive for us to see the providence of God in the development of culture and yet the pervasive rebellion that energized much of it. This helps all of God’s people in all ages to have a godly and righteous interaction with the culture around them.

The story also will show how hope comes through the promised seed. In grand contrast to times of the son of wicked Cain, in the times of the son of godly Seth will men begin to call on the name of the Lord. The opening and closing verses form the outer, level A of the chiasm.

At the heart of this story is unbelief. The text will unfold how unbelief manifests itself, individually and corporately. God’s people must learn how important faith, believing God in an obeying way, is and how dangerous unbelief is. As Israel would be approaching the Promised Land, and as we live in the midst of a sinful and wayward generation, we must not fail to believe God, trust Him and enter every day in all kinds of practical living ways, into His rest.
Prolog – The Anticipation through Sons
Moses now shifts the focus from the sad account of the fall of Adam and Eve to their two sons.

The Aspiration in the Brothers (v.1-2a)
God blesses the “be fruitful and multiply” obedience of Adam and Eve with two sons. These are not their only children as is mentioned in Genesis 5, but these two are critical to the redemptive story line of the Bible.

The Association of the Brothers (v.2b)
Through their respective occupations, Moses associates them with the past. Cain is associated with the curse as a worker of the ground. Abel is associated with the dominion responsibility of man as a keeper of the sheep.

There may also be a setup for what is about to happen.

The Sacrifice of Cain (v.1-7)
Here come the two brothers to worship, to bring their offerings to God.

Their Gifts
There is a time and place for the bringing of sacrifice. Some commentators see in this phrase, in the course of time and in the word brought, revelation and invitation from God to come to Him in a certain time and to a certain place. Many see this as pointing to the Sabbath, particularly as the immediate audience of Israelites would have heard it. If so, then here are Cain and Able, coming to worship God.

Each of them brings of the bounty of his own vocation. Cain brings produce. Abel brings a sheep. Now, we need to be careful about jumping to the conclusion that Cain is wrong to bring a gift from his harvest. When the Law is given, there are several categories of acceptable sacrifices that are grain offerings (Leviticus 2:12; Num. 18:12). Further, we are to honor the Lord with the firstfruits of all our increase (Proverbs 3:9). But, Cain may have been rejected because he was supposed to bring a lamb. If so, part of what unfolds will be jolted pride and the necessity for humility to obtain an acceptable offering from his brother.

The emphasis in the text, particularly in the Hebrew, is on the difference in the attitude with which it is brought. Notice the difference in how these offerings are described. Cain’s is simply the fruit of the ground. Nothing is said about its quality and quantity. Abel’s offering is referred to as being the firstborn of the flock and the fat portions. These two descriptions point to a gladness and fullness in what is brought. To an Israelite hearing this, they understand that Abel has brought an offering that serves as his sacrifice for sin and his delight in fellowship with God. Cain has come assuming access without blood and expecting fellowship without acknowledgment of his sinful state before God.

Hebrews 11:4 interprets these verses for us, giving us the essence of what is going on here. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his
faith, though he died, he still speaks. [ESV] Clearly, the key difference according to the author of Hebrews is faith. Quite simply, Cain comes in unbelief and Abel comes in faith. Unbelief will expect and possibly even demand God’s attention, blessings and approval while rejecting God’s way. Faith comes humbly and happily, confessing sin and entering into communion with God.

**God’s Rejection**

(v.4b-5a)

God responds to the offering and the offerer. He has regard for Abel and disregard for Cain. Hebrews 11 tells us that this regard is a matter of acceptance by God. God has regard, has a relationship with those whom he accepts. Sacrifice is necessary to be accepted by God. And we have been accepted in the Beloved. It is a matter of commendation from God. God commends Abel for his faith, his believing God in an obeying way. Not only is he received, but he is publicly approved.

Now Proverbs 21:27 tell us that the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with evil intent. [ESV] Cain does not become wicked by offering an unbelieving and improper sacrifice, then committing murder. These actions are the work of unbelief, of being a wicked man. God will not accept and will not commend his sacrifice.

Cain illustrates the kind of coming to God that is merely duty. It is obedience without the accompanying belief and desires. This way of Cain will unfold all through the Bible where true worship is substituted with religion, with the error that external performance of even required ritual will be pleasing to God. Cain’s is religion, duty, outward obedience without reality, delight and heart obedience.

**God’s Warning**

(v.5b-7)

Where Cain’s heart is in this offering is exposed in his response to God’s rejection and warning. Cain is very angry that Abel has been accepted and he has been rejected. He may well have been angry with God; but that is futile and foolish. Dust eaters and ground diggers have no right to be angry with the One who wields the flaming sword and is accompanied by the Cherubim.

Cain’s body language reflects his heart thoughts. His face falls. There is almost a sense of pouting. His lips are set, his teeth are grinding, and his eyes are looking down because his heart is churning with angry words. He is angry because he believed God would accept him without repentance. He wanted God’s approval without meeting God’s standard. He is disappointed and frustrated, not only by the disapproval of God, but by the evident pleasure of God in his brother.

God’s questions confront this sin and anger in three ways:

**A Question over Responses**

This is the kind of question that says, “Look at yourself. Can’t you see that something is wrong?” It looks beyond the outward symptoms to the heart causes. It asks “why” in a way that points Cain’s ears to his heart words.
A Call to Repentance

The call to repent is filled with gracious promise. “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” If Cain will believe God and desire what God demands, then he will do well. When people do well out of faith, then they are accepted and commended by God.

A Warning against Danger

God’s warns him of the great danger he is in. Sin is like a crouching animal or demon, waiting just outside the door. If Cain does not change his heart, then he will be dominated and mastered by sin. But, he must rule over it, master sin itself.

Unbelief is evident when people try to approach and be accepted by God in any way except through faith, through believing God in an obeying way.

The Sin of Cain (v.8-16)

The anger and jealousy in Cain’s heart now cause him hate his brother.

In his Commission (v.8)

He begins with plotting and planning. Many good manuscripts add to, “He spoke to his brother” the words, “Let us go out into the field.” This makes it clearer that what follows is premeditated. He invited his brother to join him in his fields where in secret away from the eyes of others, he could kill him. Then, Cain rises up against his brother and murders him. When Cain strikes out at Abel, he is striking out at the image of God being manifested by the approved and commended righteousness of Abel. As we will find out later with Noah, all murder of people ends up being a striking out against God. This is why this theme of violence and murder is going to be an important one running through Genesis.

So Cain becomes the first in a long line of wicked unbelievers who will express the enmity against believers. Sometimes that hatred will be restrained. Sometimes it will be only in words. But other times it will be in deeds, in killing, in persecution. It culminated in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. Finally, as the Psalmist predicts and Peter preaches, the nations will unite themselves to make war on the Prince of Peace and He will strike them with the rod of iron, the sword of the Word of God.

In his Confrontation (v.9-12)

The Lord confronts Cain with his sin. Once again we see the powerful use of questions to expose. What a wonderful question, “Cain, where is your brother?” Jesus used a question like this with Samaritan woman at the well, “Go get your husband.” The question both probes the conscience and provides an opportunity to confess and repent.

Whereas Adam and Eve attempt to conceal their sin and move away from God, Cain’s response is challenging and aggressive moving towards God. His anger is now directed against God. In his response to God, he challenges a fundamental design by God. People, all people, are to live together in community. Believers
are supposed to model what that is like. Love God and love neighbor is fleshed out in family and church community first. But Cain denies this. He denies he is responsible for his brother. He denies that he is responsible for his well-being. He implicitly denies that he is accountable for his death.

**In his Consequences** *(v.11-12)*

The first consequence is in the cry that rises up for justice. This is not just the vengeance of getting even, but the demand that justice take place. When innocent blood is shed, then punishment ought to follow. The punishment for murder is death. The wages of sin is dying. Abel’s blood cries out. But Jesus’ blood speaks of better things (Hebrews 12:18-24) – that justice has been settled.

The second is that mercy tempers justice. God could have summarily executed Cain. But He does not. Out of sheer mercy, God metes out a punishment that is basically a life sentence. He is punished in his wandering and in his working. He will not be able to settle down to grow and prosper. The land will also resist his efforts at his own vocation, farming. This is a severe mercy; it is a terrible punishment, but it is not an execution. So sinners today experience this mercy – we live in God’s world sinning against him all the time and yet He gives us rain and food, providing our needs.

**In his Complaint** *(v.13-15)*

Listen to the self-pity, irreverence and unrepentance of Cain. Here is his pride masquerading as pity. He is a whiner. He is rejecting the wisdom, mercy and righteous decisions of his Creator. He is poised to see life as too big, too difficult, too hard. He mockingly echoes the expulsion from the garden. He is expelled from the ground. He is preparing in his own mind the justification for what he would build later.

His unbelieving irreverence is shown in His wrong interpretation of the nature of his punishment. While he may be banished from the presence of God, he is not invisible to the knowledge of God. There is no place that even the righteous punishment by God can put you away from the all-seeing eye of God. sinners living under judgment and in contempt of God are still living before the face of God.

His unrepentance causes him to fear from others what he has done to Cain. He well knows that the just punishment is execution. He knows that he can justly be hunted down and executed as the murderer he is. It seems to me that he is almost accusing God of letting people do what He, God, will not do Himself.

Marvel then at the mercy and purpose of God. He marks Cain (and we have NO idea what that mark was and it doesn’t matter) in such a way that announces to people that this being punished one is under the protection of God. How stunning. How amazing. How deeply wicked is the corrupt and calculating heart that sees in God’s severe mercies unbearable circumstances.

(For those who are interested, Cain’s complaint follows the formulae of the Lament Psalms. The lament Psalms reflect perplexity and a movement towards God. Here, Cain’s lament is self-pity and a movement at God.)
In his Contempt

He moves away from the presence of God and settles down in Nod, or *Wandering*. Here is sheer contempt for God, His presence and His punishment. Cain does not live as a repentant nomad near the Garden where the Presence of God is. He moves to a place away from that presence of God in which he settles down and eventually builds a walled city. He either chooses or names the place that he lives in so that he can say, he lives in *wandering* and is therefore a *wanderer*.

Unbelief is evident when people do not love their brothers and reject the consequences of sin.

The Sons of Cain

This paragraph unfolds the development of progress and perversion.

Rejection of a Just Punishment

In rejecting his just punishment, Cain builds a city as an act of rebellion against God. He refuses to be a nomad. And since he cannot be near the Garden of God, he will build his own substitute, the city of man. He will call it the name of his own son. The enmity in the curse travels down through history in stories of the wars between the city of God and the city of man. This does not make cities evil in themselves. It does imply what is often observed that they are centers for the rapid spread and downward spiral of sin and its corruption.

Introduction of Polygamous Marriage

The first son of Cain, Lamech, expands his power and his perversion through the introduction of polygamy. He marries two women. This is not an act in ignorance of righteousness but an innovation of evil. The point here is plain for Israel and all God’s people. The practice of having more than one wife at a time begins in rebellion and continues as a wicked, but common practice.

Initiation of a Diverse Culture

In the midst of this wickedness, great natural human wisdom and skill emerges. The dominion mandate is being carried out as a natural function of the way God made people. Each Lamech’s sons becomes the founder or father, the inventor of an area or sphere of cultural and vocational development. Jabal was skilled in husbandry and livestock. Jubal was skilled in music and the making of musical instruments. Tubal-cain was the inventor and developer of skilled machine and tool making.

Once again, the mercy of God allows advancement and progress to occur, even in the wicked. It also shows us that just because the originator of something was wicked, does not make that wicked itself. It is the use to which farming, ranching, music and technology are put to which is determined by the heart.

One final observation. The pre-flood world was not primitive. These are not cave-men. There is some emerging evidence now, both through the pre-flood legends and the archeological dig at pre-flood levels, that there was an amazing amount of knowledge, skill and technology.
Assertion of an Arrogant Impunity (v.23-24)

This song is a celebration of arrogance and autonomy. This is the “tough-guy” boasting. He is untouchable. He can murder as he wishes without regard to being held in account. Lamech is the first mobster, the first tough-guy, the first wise-guy. Some young man wounded him, probably with words and he struck back by murdering him. And if Cain was untouchable, then he is even more untouchable.

I believe that this unwillingness to forgive and arrogant unrepentance is what Jesus is referring to when he tells Peter to forgive, “not just seven times, but seventy times seven.” Who do you want to be? Do you want to be like Lamech? Isn’t unforgiveness a breach of community unity? Doesn’t unforgiveness lead to anger, arrogance and abuse? Doesn’t unforgiveness often shape murderous intent?

Unbelief is evident in the rejection of God’s standards for purity in the culture.

Epilog – The Appointment of a Son (v.25-26)

Once again, we are returned to the original pair. This short paragraph bookends this chapter. What began with the wonderful promise in sons developed into hatred, violence and corruption. Now we find that God has appointed a son.

God Provides a Son (v.25)

This is what Seth means. It means that God has provided an appointed one. The faith that heard and believed with hope what God said, now points through this appointed son to another appointed and approved Son. While Seth cannot take away the sins of the world, his descendent will.

Man Calls on God (v.26)

In contrast to the wicked son of Cain, Enoch, Seth’s son is godly Enosh. When we look at the genealogies, we find they are contemporaries. Even while wickedness is spreading and spiraling, there are those during the days of Enosh who call on the Name of the Lord. Abel’s blood cries out. Now men call out. Abel’s blood calls out for vengeance. Men begin to call out for mercy.

Conclusion

There is so much here to summarize and apply. Let us consider just these:

WATCH THE PATTERN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNBELIEF. It begins in worship. It spreads outward to the immediate community of family and neighbor. It then spreads like contagion in the culture until its deadly poison infects everything. This spread is expounded in and explained in Romans 1. There is a great exchange taking place. There is a growing rebellion with steps of judgment and deeper sin. Be careful, brothers and sisters. When your worship of God is mere ritual and no longer real, you are on the edge of a deep and dark precipice.

APPROACH GOD WITH TRUE FAITH THAT IS APPROVED AND COMMENDED. Cain’s way of ritual and religion, of dutiful obedience only, made him terribly vulnerable to sin’s mastery. How you come to gathered, public worship is a reflection of how you walk with God. If you walk with God in faith through the week, you will worship God in
faith on the Lord’s Day. But there are some of you I am sure who are here like Cain – you do not believe these things and thus do not sense their great reality.

**BE ON ALERT FOR THE SYMPTOMS OF UNBELIEF.** *(Adapted Creation and Blessing, Ross)*

- Unbelief produces anger and jealousy as God approves the more faithful (v.1-5).
- Unbelief disregards the warnings against sin (v.6-8).
- Unbelief refuses to accept responsibility for sin (v.9).
- Unbelief protests the punishment for sin, often in expressions of self-pity (v.10-14).
- Unbelief may continue even under Divine mercy provision and protection (v.15-16)
- Unbelief rejects the limitations of the consequences or punishment for sin (v.16-17).
- Unbelief is contagious for our children and for our culture (v.18-22).
- Unbelief charges and challenges God (v.23-24)

**WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED BY THE ENMITY AND HATRED OF THE WORLD.** All through the Bible, God’s people have suffered at the hands of the world. We should be alarmed when the church is at peace with the world and moves into friendship with it.

**BE WARNED OF THE DANGERS OF ANGER, JEALOUSY, GRUDGES AND UNFORGIVENESS.**

Humble yourself. Put off your pride. Seek the transforming grace of God to love Him and love neighbor. Meditate much on Ephesians 4:17-5:21. Consider the meekness and gentleness, the spiritual strength and stamina of the Lord Jesus.

**WE NEED TO THINK DEEPLY ABOUT THE GROWING EXPOSURE OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO VIOLENCE.** Vicarious violence is just as wicked as vicarious sex. The Bible commends to us the strength and gentleness of meekness. We must do all we can to foster that, in ourselves and in our children. In our Annual Family Conference coming up in January (entitled *Extreme Parent Transformation*), we are going to talk about this more.

**WE MUST BELIEVE AND TREASURE THE PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY, TO CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD.** Listen, in closing, to the practical exhortations from 1 John 3:11-18 where we have a New Covenant application of the Genesis 4 account.

**GOD HAS APPOINTED AND APPROVED HIS OWN SON AS OUR REDEEMER AND RULER.** Do not challenge His counsel. Do not treat His mercies with irreverence and arrogance. Believe and bow to Him. Be one among the number who in our own day, begin to call on the Name of the Lord.
Moses had a problem. He is supposed to be leading the people of God out of Egypt to the promised land. But the people he is leading are so immersed in the culture of their day, that he must give them their identity and their history. Genesis is that history and identity. While it functions to inform the people of God, to launch the strands of redemptive history, it also serves to debunk the myths of his day. It should not surprise us that those same myths are reemerging today.

Here are some of the myths, ancient and modern, that Genesis answers. These core underlying myths were expressed in the ancient religions and in some of modern science, so-called.

- Matter has always existed.
- There is no reality behind and beyond the universe, the universe is ultimate reality.
- The earth/cosmos is very ancient.
- There are many gods, beings, intelligences in the universe and many equally true belief systems.

We have already seen the powerful polemic of Genesis against these myths. Genesis 5-6 will speak to others. We are leaving a post-modern age and entering a neo-pagan or neo-mysticism age with the loss of a coherent, rational world view.

For Example, a popular movie of several years ago has enjoyed a modest run as a series on television. The movie and the series is called *Stargate*. The premise is simply that the ancient myths and stories of the gods and humans come from a time when the great alien races that inhabit the universe visited earth. A particularly nasty and evil race have been making war across the universe attempting to assert dominance, using humans, as well as other civilizations as their slaves. The ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman gods were simply the names of powerful aliens and races who were at war with one another. Makes a great Sci-fi flick if you are into that sort of thing until you read Genesis 6.

I am sure many of you will be surprised to learn that there are serious studies at several major universities through the world who are proposing new sciences, sociologies and psychologies based on and guided by the ancient mystic religions. While not yet mainstream, it will not be long. The alternative medicines with their mysticism and occultism are already mainstream in nursing and in some medical practices. We are now in the world of first century Christianity. Pragmatic technologies existing alongside the most irrational of mythologies.

With the polemic as a sub-purpose, there is a central common theme in these two chapters. Moses is very concerned to show the preservation and the purity of the line of the promised one, the coming Redeemer, the Messiah.
Chronology
– The Establishment of the Redeemer’s Line (5:1-32)

This section can be challenging. It is easy to want to overlook the chronology just to hit the three high points. But I want to us to think carefully about the chronology as well as focusing on the three people commented on by our author.

Its History

Why does Moses include chronologies? More to the point, why is the formula followed? There is a definite, born, lived so long until begat, lived so long after begat, died rhythm. First, he is establishing the line to Abraham which will eventually be picked up and extended to Christ. While this may not seem important to us, that Jesus is the son of Adam, the son of Abraham and the son of David all establish his credentials. The gospel writers will come back to the chronologies and use them to prove the identity of Jesus.

Second, Moses is showing that the earth is not very, very old. Many scholars scoff at the idea that the years from Adam to Abraham can be calculated. They argue that these numbers are unreliable because they are symbolical or there are generations between the father and son. Yet, it is quite easy to calculate the years here. You simply add up the ages at which the father begat a son. It seems to me that there is no reason to record the years if they were not reliable. I believe they are. Therefore, there are 1656 or 1657 years from the creation of Adam to the flood. The creation was around 4000 BC and the flood occurred 2344 or 2343 BC. (See page 52 for a chart develop by a Mike Brown as an appendix to this chapter.)

So this history is important. This redemptive history establishes the credentials for our Redeemer. This history that Moses and all the writers give is selected for how it brings us to Jesus. It may not do it directly in that it points directly to Christ. But in all sorts of multifaceted ways, redemptive history is about Christ.

Its Highlights

In the wearying repetition of birth and death, three important people are highlighted.

Adam – The Transmission of Humanity (v.1-3)

Adam is made in the image of God. He receives his essence and person from God directly. He is designed and made by God. Seth is begotten in the image of Adam. So Adam transmits to Seth the image of God he receives from God. We also know from the Bible, that he also transmits his sinfulness.

One other point is being made here. The true lineage of the coming Redeemer is through Seth. There were many, many families on the earth all of whom came from Adam and Eve. But out of all those families, Seth was to be the start of the line to the coming one. No one else may make that claim. No one outside of the line of Seth can be the promised one.
**Enoch – The Example of Holiness**  
(v.21-24)  
Here we find a man who trusted God, who had faith in God. How do we know that? Because Enoch is said to have walked with God. Hebrews 11 tells us that whenever in the Old Testament we find what faith produces, we should see faith. Enoch walked with God by faith, by trusting in God.

Enoch was taken up into heaven by God. Enoch is the first man not to die. He escapes the curse and the judgment on sin. Here is hope. Those who trust and walk with God have the hope of escaping the world of sin. That world is left by faith. God took him up and so he is translated or even better, raised up to heaven.

**Noah – The Expectation of Hope**  
(v.28-32)  
Lamech expresses the wearying care due to the burden of the curse. The work is hard and burdensome. The curse in all its aspects brings difficulty and death. Here is a longing for change, a desire for relief. The word translated *relief* here is *rest*. The word for *rest* here sounds like the Hebrew word Noah. The daily round of labor in fallenness spurs a desire for the relief of rest. Now don’t miss in the practical sweat of Lamech’s brow and the irony of Noah’s name, the line of thought. We image bearers may walk with God but we will long for the rest, the Sabbath, that comes only from God.

But there was a hope for comfort in the son. The irony here is unmistakable. Noah may bring rest and relief out of the ground. But it will not come as expected!

The lesson in this chapter is that we live in a fallen world, full of death and dying. The curse is terrible.

**Corruption**  
– The Attack on the Redeemer’s Line  
(6:1-5)  
Now I have chosen to take all this together. The unifying theme is the Redeemer’s line. In chapter 5 it is established and in chapter 6 it is attacked. Satan seeks to destroy the redemptive plan of God. He began with the murderous destruction of Abel. Now, as the human race proliferates, he attempts to destroy by corrupting it.

**Its Pollution**  
(v.1-4)  
First, he attempts to pollute the human race through the contamination of the Seed Line. I am going to take a moment to talk about what is going on here, partially because it is difficult and partially because I believe it has bearing on what is going on today.

There are three common views on the identity of the sons of God and the daughters of men. One view says that the sons of God are the descendants of Seth and the daughters of men are the descendants of Cain. The intermarrying then destroys the purity of the line of Seth. This is usually argued as though the context of chapter 5 makes it necessary or desirable. The problem is why would only the men in Seth’s line want to marry outside their family line? Why isn’t Moses just plain about it? Why use this obtuse way of speaking?
The second view is that the sons of God here are mighty kings or rulers of the past, so intelligent and so powerful, that they achieved god-like status. These human “supermen” defile sanctity of marriage with adultery and fornication. Again, it is hard to see why the terms here. Further, why would this produce a special kind of offspring who are heroes yet loathsome.

The view I take is that this is an attempt to pollute the purity of the human race by the intermarriage of fallen angels and human women. Now, I know this sounds fantastic and almost surreal, but let’s think about it for a moment.

In a cluster of texts in Job, angels are referred to as sons of God (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Job is interesting because he is probably a contemporary of Abraham and may have known Noah.

Angels always appear as young males. Never ever in the Bible is an angel female. They are always alluded to with masculine traits, pronouns and are called by masculine names. We know that God manifests a being physically according to its essential nature.

Angels are not married nor given in marriage (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25). But that does not mean they are sexless. In the face of this text here, we should at least be open to the possibility that angels are not only male in their persons but also in their bodies. It is also possible that these fallen angels inhabit male human bodies for sex. However, it is hard to see how that would produce the offspring they do.

This union produced a class of beings called the Nephilim. They occur here, and as is mentioned, later on afterward. They are also in Canaan and are part of the bad report the spies gave at Kadesh-Barnea. The literature on this is staggering. The word simply means mighty ones, ones who fall upon. What is being conveyed here has come down to us through history as the demi-gods of the ancient (and modern) mythologies. Notice that the text says that this union brought them forth. They may be the half-breed offspring of the union of fallen angels and human women.

Jude 2:6-7 seems to be referring to Genesis 6. It describes the vile fallen angels who left their first – and the word is either habitation or station or domain. They are like the homosexuals of Sodom and Gomorrah who practice perverse immorality and go after strange flesh. That, I believe, is a reference to the story of the angelic visitation of Lot in Sodom when the men of Sodom wanted Lot to turn over the angels to them for sex. The comparison here makes sense if Genesis 6 is talking about the same sort of wicked polluting union.

This union takes place, at least after the Flood, in the pagan temples where sacred prostitution is practiced. While not common here, in the ancient world, sex with a priest or priestess was considered a sacred union with the gods conveying blessing, particularly, fertility on the home and fields. Israel is being warned against the pagan fertility practices that will be common among the Canaanites. Israel’s history shows her sad vulnerability to the enticements of the Ashtarte, the groves and idols where she committed adultery against her husband-king, Yahweh.
Its Pervasiveness (v.5)
The line is also attacked by the pervasive spread of sin and depravity. Look carefully at this charge. Man’s wickedness was great in its variety and inventiveness. There were not only lots of sin, but the most incredible diversity and ingenuity applied to create new and exciting expressions of rebellion against God.

The next sentence is stunning. Look at the description: every motive of every thought was only evil all the time. Men’s hearts were oriented in their thoughts and desires toward only evil at every moment. Depravity unrestrained. Depravity imagining evil with not only the actual thoughts, but the direction and desire of every thought. I take this indictment literally. It is almost as though the ingenuity and inventiveness of man was given free reign. Instead of applying their great intelligence and imagination to creative expressions of worship, obedience and godly dominion over creation, it was applied to the most appalling depravities. Think of it this way: imagine how wicked that world had become that God not only had to wipe out all humanity, but also almost every trace of the civilizations of that day.

Condemnation - the Preservation of the Redeemer’s Line (v.6-8)
Its Sorrow (v.6)
Notice God’s response. He is sorry, grieved and angry. What He has made has now become polluted and poisoned. Here we find the godly response to sin. There is grief over the marred purpose and folly of sin. There is anger over the rejection and rebellion against God. Here is the heart of God over sinners and sin: mingled grief and wrath.

Now this raises a very important question: Was God unable to anticipate this so that He changes what He is doing? There is a growing heresy led by men like Greg Boyd and John Sanders that teaches that God could not know ahead that this would be the actual course of man before the Flood. God is moving along the “Now” just as we are. He cannot know the actual future decisions of “free-will” beings, only their potential decisions. This text is often cited as proof of their ideas. This is heresy. This is pagan.

I will not take the time to answer this view in great detail. Only let me say that the Bible clearly teaches that God knows all that is, was, can be and will be, not merely as an act of knowing but as a result of willing. In other words, God, had decided and decreed that this depravity leading to destruction would take place. The Bible also teaches that God is actively interacting with man along the trajectory of His decrees. He is joyful and grieved as He is actually engaged with and responding to that which He has determined to bring about. While this is difficult, it is exactly what the Bible portrays. Absolute full knowledge in conjunction with absolute full sovereignty and a real, living interaction that produces decisions and emotions in time.
So, you need to have some clear confessional truths (doctrine) in your heart. Please be patient while I simply assert these without attempting to prove them. We have discussed these at length in a series several years ago in which we engaged and exposed Open Theism for the heresy it is.

God wills sin to take place in such a way that it does take place and God is not responsible for the sin, the one sinning is.

God is above and over all things, separate from and not dependent on anything and is actively involved and engaged with events and people in time.

God can interact with His creation in a real and living way and remains immutable and unchangeable in His essence, that is, His person, character, purity and purposes.

The Bible holds up for us to marvel at the sorrow of God over sin. Yes, He is angry over sin. But sin also grieves Him and brings sorrow. Yahweh grieves for His adulterous wife. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit is grieved over our sin, particularly the sins of our speech. Does your Christlikeness include sorrow over the sad state of sin?

**Its Sentence**

God has indicted man in his sin. Now God passes the sentence. All humanity will die. So will a lot of the rest of the created order. God will blot them out under the waters He has stored up from creation. Such utter destruction shows the utter extent of sin. Here is not internal contradiction in God. He is just. God’s justice encompasses a great sorrow over sin and a great wrath against it. This is no stoic, uninvolved, dispassionate meting out of massive punishment. This is the infinite, eternal, holy, sovereign creator-ruler of the universe, spurned by His creatures, spiraling downward into unspeakable wickedness whose great heart breaks and whose mighty justice moves mercifully and mightily.

Just a note here as well. Romans tells us that the created order suffers under the curse and strains forward for the day of release. That suffering was not of its own account. It is because of Adam’s sin and the succeeding sinfulness of man. Here is that same suffering and that same delivering. In all the suffering of the creatures both great and small, there is a reminder that we are its ultimate cause. We sinned – they suffer. We will be glorified – they will be freed!

**Its Savior**

Then this wonderful phrase in the midst of universal sin and ultimate destruction, “Noah found favor in God’s sight.” This phrase occurs 27 times in the Old Testament and 2 times in the New (once as a quote from the Old). It means that God delighted in, enjoyed, looked upon with a smile of joy. What a thing to experience the smile of God. In the midst of such darkness, here is not just a glimmer of light. Here is a thousand faceted million candle power light.

Now we must not think that the favor God found, the delight He had, in Noah is something Noah caused on his own. What characterized this favor according to Hebrews 11 is the kind of faith that produced reverent fear and diligent obedience. What was gone from all around Noah was respect for God. God delighted
in Noah’s faith, reverence and obedience. Do you long for the smile of God? Believe in Him and bow to Him. He will find favor in a reverent faith and fear that diligently obeys.

So God willed it. God is grieved over it. He purposes and plans to destroy all humanity. And He purposes and plans to deliver a remnant. And it was a sad and sorry day in which to live. In the last 500 years before the great Flood, it appears that only Noah and his family are left. They are a godly remnant in the midst of appalling depravity.

**Conclusion**

Let me conclude by summarizing and applying some lessons here.

Notice the importance in the Bible and in redemptive history of lineage. The chronologies of the Bible are very important to its story line. Now, we do not make a silly application like, “God thinks your family line is important so we ought to try to discover and preserve our family lineages.” The lesson here is that the lineage of Christ, our Redeemer is very important in His humanity.

We are not so distant from this kind of polytheistic and pluralistic world. The polemic of Genesis against the gods and goddesses of their day will be important for us as the west sinks ever more into paganism, mysticism and the occult.

Against the polytheism of our day, we need to assert that there is only one God, the God of the Bible. This may sound arrogant. But it is truth.

Against the pluralism of our day, we need to assert that there is absolute truth. We are not dealing with various, equal interpretations of reality. We are dealing with the God who created and is over all reality.

We are warned that the very same pollution that existed in Genesis 6 and in Canaan in the days of the conquest may well be on the rise in these last days. It is beginning in the imagination and in fantasies. At present, concourse with the spirit world sexually is largely the stuff of movies, TV and dark corners of the internet and our nation. But it may become as accepted as homosexuality and other perversions are.

A pattern is established in this account that is a dominant theme through the Bible. This repeated theme is simply: simultaneous destruction and deliverance. While wrath falls, God preserves His people. Egypt is destroyed in the very Red Sea Israel passes through. Jerusalem is destroyed and God has preserved a remnant in exile. Jesus is destroyed, crushed on the cross; so, sin is defeated and we are delivered.
And God will bring the fulfillment in Christ of the new Adam, the righteous Enoch and the delivering Noah. The Lord Jesus is the new Adam whose realm of obedience is entered by faith. The Lord Jesus is the righteous Enoch who walked with God by faith and was taken up into heaven, death having no claim on Him. The Lord Jesus is the delivering Noah whose ark of salvation shields us and saves us from the certain and sure wrath of God.

When fallenness is terrible, when sinfulness is terrible, when the wrath of God is terrible, marvel at our Redeemer.

Who makes us new men in His image;

Who causes us to walk with God and will take us to be with Him;

Who makes an ark of safety to deliver his sons and daughters from sin and wrath.

Appendix
Thank you to Mike Brown for this excellent chart.
The Flood: Judgment on Sin

Introduction

To moderns, the story of Noah and the Ark is an interesting, but fantastic myth, a nice story for overly religious people and children’s coloring books. Most of the great writing civilizations have flood myths in their oral and written traditions. So, it is not surprising that the Christian tradition should have one as well. Whole web sites are dedicated to debunking special creation, young earth science and the Flood.

Hebrews 11 tells us that is by faith we believe in creation. It is by faith we believe in the Flood. Faith is belief in what the Bible tells us. I have asserted even with close friends who did not believe in a 6 day special creation and denied a global flood that they then had to think carefully about their why and on what basis did they believe the rest of the Bible.

While skeptics argue against the Flood narrative saying that it is scientifically impossible, there is something more at stake. Two things are intertwined throughout the Flood narrative: God judges sin. God saves the just. God is punishing and purifying. If God would have caused or allowed such a global cataclysm, then we may face such judgment again.

There are many questions that are raised by skeptics about the idea of a Global Flood. Is a global flood being portrayed here? Is a global flood even physically or scientifically possible? Can the demands of the text be satisfied by (1) the whole globe was not populated by man and animals so (2) the Flood destroyed all humanity and animals because it did inundate where they lived? There has been a long history of science scoffing at the idea of a global flood citing the many scientific difficulties. In reading some of the scholarly work on this, I have observed a common and unbiblical thread through all of them. They assume that the world and the topography of the world we live in now is the same. This is not true. Listen carefully to a very important New Testament text that I believe presses home the literal accuracy of the Mosaic account:

Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 2 Peter 3:3-7 [ESV]

Peter may have Psalm 90:3-8 in mind when he penned this text.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
You return man to dust and say,
“Return, O children of man!”
For a thousand years in your sight
are but as yesterday when it is past, 
or as a watch in the night.
You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning:
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.
For we are brought to an end by your anger;
your wrath we are dismayed.
You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your presence. [ESV]

Here is a sampling list of other Bible texts that refer to the Flood most of which treat the Genesis record as historically accurate: Isaiah 54:8; Matthew 24:36-44; Luke 17:26-27; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:17.

As we move into our study of the text itself, rather than using a western style outline, we will follow the Bible’s own structure. This section follows a chiastic structure. Here is an overview so you can have it in your minds eye as we move through the text.

A  God Purposes to Punish the World  (6:11-13)
   B  Noah Builds the ark  (6:14-22)
       C  The Remnant Enters the Ark  (7:1-9)
           D  The Flood Begins  (7:10-16)
               E  The Flood Prevails  (7:17-24)
                   F  God Remembers Noah  (8:1a)
                       e  The Flood Recedes  (8:1b-5)
                           d  The Earth Dries  (8:6-14)
                                           c  The Remnant Leaves the Ark  (8:15-19)
                                               b  Noah Builds an Altar  (8:20)
                                                   a  God Promises to Preserve the World  (8:21-22)

So let us begin our study of this large and amazing section of God’s Word.
The Prolog

These two verses serve as the prolog to the next unit, the next TolpDot, of Genesis. The focus here, building on Noah having found favor in God’s sight (v.8) is on his standing with God and man. He was righteous and blameless. He was in right standing with God. God’s favor on him and righteousness in him are joined with being blameless in his times. Certainly, sinless perfection is not being implied here. But here is a man who is pleasing to God and who undertakes a great task in the midst of terrible times. He walks with God. In the horribly sinful conditions of his day, Noah walks with God. He is preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). If he can, then, brothers and sisters, with all we know and all we have in Christ, so can we, even in the end of the age.

A God Purposes to Punish the World (6:11-13)

Once again, the Scriptures give us the reason for the Flood. One of the pagan accounts of the Flood is called the Gilgamesh epic. Contrary to it, the cause of the Flood is located in the wrath of God against the pervasive sin of man. Here, the effect of man’s sin is indicated for now the way of all flesh is corrupted in all the earth. Once again, the depth to which humanity has sunk is highlighted in not only corruption, but the earth is filled with violence.

So, God declares His intent to destroy all flesh. He announces to Noah his reasons and his plans. The evil and wickedness is universal, so the destruction must be as well. There are commentators who argue the Flood could not be global. They cannot be making that argument from the text itself. The text clearly says that as far as humanity has spread, and that over all the earth, the extent destruction will be as well. The words used here for flood and elsewhere in the Bible referring to this event do not use common words for a flood. In fact, the word used all through the Flood account is the Hebrew word mabbul. It is used only of this event. The word for a local flood is a different Hebrew word. The New Testament uses the word kataklusmos when alluding to the Genesis Flood. These are words that imply cataclysm and destruction. The choice is to affirm that this is what the Bible plainly says and then either accept it as true or to deny it by saying Moses was mistaken in some way. It is false that Genesis does not teach a global flood. It does. If there was no global flood, then Moses is simply mistaken, the Bible record reflects his error and your doctrine of Scripture is weakened. So, according to the Genesis record, God purposes to punish the world.

B Noah Builds the Ark (6:14-22)

To preserve the remnant through the coming judgment, God instructs Noah to build an ark, a massive boat. Hebrews 11:7 tells us that Noah believed God in an obeying way. In reverent fear he built what God commanded for the saving of his household. I am struck here by the union of command and wisdom. As it is recorded in the Scripture, God gives enough instruction to identify what was to be built, but seems to have left the details of construction up to the wisdom and skill Noah had.
Its Amazing Design (v.14-16)

It is hard for us to get a feel for how large the ark actually was. Our building is 80 feet wide and 120 feet long and around 27 feet high at the peak. The ark then at 450 feet long by 75 feet wide by 45 feet high is a little less than 4 times as long and twice as high. It had three decks; a roof with an opening all the way around, is constructed with now unknown wood and sealed with "pitch".

Several objections have been raised on the design and purpose of the ark.

- No one could have built by hand a boat that large. How could Noah possibly have the technology, funds, time and man-power for such a project.

- A wooden boat that large would break in half even under normal sea and wave stresses. No wooden boat that large has ever been attempted, even in the last 200 years. Ships larger than 275 – 300 feet have broken along their spine.

- How could you possibly have a floating zoo housing two of all the species of insects, animals and birds all being cared for over a whole year? The task of feeding and cleaning the stalls would alone require an army of attendants, much less 8 people.

- How would you keep carnivores from being unmanageable over that length of time in that confined a space with (presumably) little or no meat or prey?

- How could you possibly provision food and water for that many animals and humans for over a year? Imagine just the cost of procurement, much less of packaging, loading, storing and distributing the food.

Some of the objections, having to do with cost and ability, make certain assumptions about primitiveness of Noah’s day. We really do not know that the ark was built by hand. Even then, it appears that Noah had up to 120 years to build it. Yes, it was a mammoth task to collect all the materials for the construction and provision of the ark. But Noah worked hard and God supplied. It is not logistically impossible, merely difficult. We also do not know if this task fell alone on Noah and his family’s shoulders. It is quite possible that he hired laborers to help build, farm, harvest, store and load the provisions. As is often the case, the Bible is not interested in giving us these kinds of details unless it has direct bearing on the purpose of the narrative.

The second cluster of objections relate to the size of the boat itself. Many studies have been done on its dimensions. The relationship of the length, height and width all would make an extremely stable craft. Studies on scale models using computers to factor up the weight, mass and momentum all show that the ark would right itself, even when tipped almost to 75 degrees. It would have turned through wave and wind action into waves. As to its size making it weak along its length, therefore vulnerable to snapping in half, here the wisdom of building with wood is seen. An internal structure built with
tens of thousands of small rooms all designed as an integral part of the boat’s strength and flexibility would yield an extraordinarily strong vessel that would plow through most waves and be able to flex enough to deal with wave motion stresses.

Now as to some of the other objections, let’s consider what we have. [The ark’s] volume was 1.54 million cubic feet. To put this in perspective, this is the equivalent volume of 522 standard American railroad stock cars, each of which can hold 240 sheep. If the animals were kept in cages large enough for an average size the 16,000 animal [pairs] would only occupy around 14.4 stock cars. [Even including small space for insects in addition still] would leave room for five trains of 99 cars each for food, Noah’s family and ‘range’ for the animals. Tabulating the total volume is fair enough, since this shows that there would be plenty of room on the Ark for the animals with plenty left over for food, range etc… Woodmorappe shows from standard recommended floor space requirements for animals that all of them together would have needed less than half the available floor space of the Ark’s three decks. This arrangement allows for the maximum amount of food and water storage on top of the cages close to the animals… Woodmorappe [also] calculated that the volume of foodstuffs would have been only about 15 % of the Ark’s total volume. Drinking water would only have taken up 9.4 % of the volume. This volume would be reduced further if rainwater was collected and piped into troughs.

[Some have objected because the animal dung and waste] would have required overwhelming man-hours [for cleaning]. It is doubtful whether the humans had to clean the cages every morning. Possibly they had sloped floors or slatted cages, where the manure could fall away from the animals and be flushed away (plenty of water around!) or destroyed by vermicomposting (composting by worms) which would also provide earthworms as a food source. Very deep bedding can sometimes last for a year without needing a change. Absorbent material (e.g. sawdust, softwood wood shavings and especially peat moss) would reduce the moisture content and hence the odor. The space, feeding and excretory requirements were adequate even if the animals had normal day/night sleeping cycles. But hibernation is a possibility which would reduce these requirements even more.²

**Its Salvation Purpose**

God again emphasis the global destruction that is about to take place. He is going to bring flood waters on the earth that will destroy everything that breathes. Everything that is on the earth will die. This mighty global flood will wipe out all life. The earth is so corrupt that God will both punish it and purify it with waters of His wrath.

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² Sarfati, Jonathan. *Creation Magazine (online)* Volume 19 Issue 2 Full acknowledgment with redaction and rewording.
The purpose for the ark then is to preserve those whom God had chosen to deliver. He establishes a covenant with Noah that God will deliver them. There is the promise of God to preserve Noah. Then there must a believing of that promise in such a way that he goes to the hard work of building the ark, collecting the animals and almost a year of resting in the promise and the provision while all the rest of living, breathing life dies.

God purposes through the saving of Noah and his family, to preserve the animals as well. Once again, the close link between man and the created order is assumed. God has made us stewards to learn and to extend dominion. God does not just miraculously preserve the animals nor do a new work of creation after the flood. Noah and his family, as recipients of the promise, will also bring the animals God had chosen to preserve through with him.

**Its Practical Filling** *(v.19-22)*

God commands Noah what to bring on the ark by listing the creation groups of animals as well as identifying them according to their kinds. He was to bring a male/female set of each kind. It is reasonable to assume that all of the different kinds living in Noah’s day were brought into the ark and preserved. Now, this does not mean that we can use the modern scientific categories, particularly at the species level, to say who these were. According to many texts in the Bible, a “kind” is defined by being able to reproduce and have viable offspring. So, it may well be that there were one set of dogs, one set of horses, one set of cats, etc. Many scientists have pointed out then that this means there were around 16,000 kinds of animals (including the birds) on the ark. The ark was capable of holding 135,000 sheep, individually penned. It is quite evident that it is fully capable to hold between 35,000 and 50,000 animals, many of whom would be very small (rats, frogs, birds, etc.). It is generally agreed, that in the wisdom Noah had about everything else, he would probably have taken on mostly very young animals as being smaller, less troublesome and more resistant to rapid climatic and environmental changes.

Noah was also commanded to provide the necessary food as well. Every sort of food necessary would need to be harvested, packaged and stored. We have already seen that the ark was of adequate size to house the animals, the 8 humans and all the foodstuffs necessary for them.

Noah did what God commanded. Now stop and think about all the massive effort and labor poured into this simple sentence. Believing God in an obeying way usually leads, not to ease, but to years of hard work.

**C The Remnant Enters the ark** *(7:1-9)*

Noah is now commanded to enter the ark. His hard work to build the ark is commended by God who observes or takes note of the practical and public righteousness of Noah. He is to take, in addition to all the animals by twos, seven of all the clean animals and birds. We know from the Mosaic Law what the clean animals and birds were. God is making provision so that clean animals will dominate the animal kingdom and to provide more for sacrifice.
God gives them seven days to complete the loading of the ark. Creation scientists have argued that the migration instinct was used by God to bring the animals to the ark’s construction site. From the language here, these seven days are to load the household and an additional seven of the clean. It appears that the rest were already on-board.

Again, Noah is warned about the global and cataclysmic destruction by water that is about to happen. God will send 40 days of rain and destruction that will wipe out all life. Noah has a promise. Noah has a warning. Noah is obedient. When he is 600 years old, he enters the ark. He takes his family, his three sons and their wives on board. He finishes loading the animals. And just as God said, on the eighth day, the waters of the flood came.

D The Flood Begins

The Bible tells us the exact day, month and year that the great Flood began. Noah was told in the second month the ninth day to board the ark. On the seventeenth day, the explosion of waters from beneath the surface and from the heavens erupted and poured across the face of the earth. Assuming that Moses is using the Jewish calendar of the Mosaic Law, then this would have been the seventeenth day of May, 2344 BC as calculated from the date Abraham left Haran (well-established date in history and the Bible [Genesis 12:4]) or around 1,656 years after creation using the Genesis 5 chronology. If Moses is using the civil Jewish calendar, then this is November of the same year.

Verses 13-15 again relate the catalog of all that entered the ark and were preserved through the flood. The description is somewhat expanded to point verbally back to the categories established at creation. Beasts and every winged creature are referred to. It is almost as though Moses is wanting to make sure that anyone hearing and reading the text gets the point. Every breathing living thing on the earth is destroyed. All that went on the ark lived. The amazing diversity we see today came from all the kinds preserved through the Flood.

What is the mechanism that God uses to bring a flood of waters across all the earth? Now, I want to consider objections that are raised. I will only bring forward the serious ones grounded in science.

- There is simply not enough water on the earth for a global flood. The amount of water needed to cover all the mountains of the earth exceeds all the water on the earth.

- It is physically impossible that forty days of continuous rain would occur and would cover the earth with water.

- Where did all that water go? Surely there were seas before the flood. Evaporation, oceans and polar ice simply do not have enough water volume for the million-trillions of cubic feet of water required to cover the mountains.
First, let us remember that at some level, this is exactly the kind of uniformitarianism that was used, in Peter’s day, to deny Divine judgment in the future. 2 Peter 3:3-7 tell us some very important things about the world that then was and the world that now is. The world antediluvian (before Flood) world was formed by water and out of water by which waters it was destroyed at God’s word (command). Our present world is being reserved to be destroyed by fire. Peter implies that the world before Noah was different in many ways, not the least of which was the storing of water at its creation which were used to destroy it at the Flood.

Does the rest of Scripture attest to this as well? Yes, the witness of Scripture from the Flood accounts themselves to the Psalms to the book of Peter is that the Flood was not the product of just rain from heaven. We have already seen in our study of Genesis that the dry land was formed by taking the deep of waters and storing them in the earth and the sea. Psalm 33:6-7 attest to this as well, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; He puts the deeps in storehouses.”

But now look with me at Proverbs 8:27-31, where wisdom is describing the creation.

When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man. [ESV]

The fountains of the deep were established at creation. The sea (and yes, it is singular, implying a single ocean and a single land mass) was given its boundary and the inner structures of the earth founded. Our text here in verse 11 says that “the fountains of the great deep burst forth.” In other words, the great subterranean reservoirs of waters from the original creation exploded through the surface of the earth and poured across it. The massive destruction that can occur downstream from a broken dam is devastatingly multiplied across the whole continent. The world of Noah’s day was probably a single land mass and a single ocean. The destructive power of moving water, rapid division and drift of the continents through plate tectonics during the Flood, the explosive force of volcanic action with dust blown into the atmosphere all bring about the destruction across the globe. The dust in the air, the water rushing up from the deeps, and evaporation would provide the mechanics for the amount of water on the earth and the extended global rain.

Then the Scriptures also say that God opened the windows of heaven so that it rained for 40 days across the earth. Here, we do not have much else in the Scripture to know what is meant here. Some have postulated a vapor canopy over the earth from creation to the Flood
providing a universal tropical climate and radioactive shielding yielding the longevity of the antediluvians. The collapse of this vapor canopy may have been the source of the rain. There are many problems with this idea. It is seems more reasonable to say that God had restrained rain from falling, initially caused it to rain and then the ordinary process of evaporation and rain took place with the waters from the deeps providing the moisture.

In view of the destruction that was about to occur, the last phrase of verse 15 is significant. God shut them in. The great door through which all who entered and were to be saved was shut and sealed by God. All were safe and sound. God had closed the door.

**E The Flood Prevails** (7:17-24)

As God promised, the flood came right on time and exactly as He said. Here is an expanded reading of the text here: the cataclysmic Flood (mabbul) was coming on the earth for forty days. The waters raged upward and carried up the ark quickly and it rose high above the earth on the face of the rising waters. The waters were overwhelmingly mighty inundating the earth with the ark floating on the surface of the waters-waters (Hebrew intensity). The waters covered the all including the hills and mountains, even to a depth of approximately 22 feet.

There is no mistaking the mighty power of the bursting forth of the deeps and the pouring out of rain from the heavens. It was an explosive rush of water upward so that the ark was quickly carried up. In other words, it did not take very long for the waters at the construction site to reach the depth of 20-25 feet needed for the ark to begin to float. And those mighty waters covered all the hills and mountains. While we do not know what the height of those mountains in that day would have been, the text tells us the whole surface of the earth was covered, inundated, overwhelmed with waters.

The effect of this Flood is also recorded. All flesh died. Everything that had breath, died. God blotted out every living thing. The repetition here with variation is a Hebrew literary structure. Its purpose is to assert, absolutely, without qualification and without question, that every living thing on earth was swept away, blotted out, destroyed, died. Only those safe in the ark lived.

Moses tells us the waters mightily overwhelmed the earth for 150 days. This would include the first 40 days in which the rain poured down and the deeps gushed upward. In working out a chronology of the Flood, you have basically from the 2nd month the 17th day of the 600th year of Noah’s life to the 2nd month the 27th day of the 601st year of Noah’s life as the beginning and ending points. This is around 377 days (on a 30 day month calendar).
Many of you have seen the pictures of the recent tsunami. The destructive power of the waves and the water was amplified by the scouring effect of the debris. Multiply this across the whole earth. Imagine the tsunamis that swept across rising waters of the seas as they crashed further and further inland. What an awful year of judgment as the wrath of God is poured out.

**Part 2**

**E The Flood Recedes (8:1b-5)**

God moves with three distinct actions to reverse the Flood. These actions were taken by God. While they may be in the natural realm, the Bible is portraying a direct intervention by God. God halts the flow from the fountains of the deep and closes the windows of heaven. These two actions halt the source of waters of the Flood.

Also, God causes a wind to blow across the earth so that the waters subsided. This word is same as used in Genesis 1 where the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of the deep. Moses is intentionally creating a verbal and visual parallel. The old creation made out of water was hovered over by the Spirit of God. Now, this new creation, this postdiluvial world emerges as the wind from God, the breath of God, moves across the surface of the waters. Certainly, this would have manifested itself as simply a strong, prevailing wind. So God has now intervened to bring the process of drying the earth so that can be inhabited again.

At the end of the initial 150 days, as the waters begin to recede, the ark comes to rest on the mountains in the area of Ararat. This happened on the 7th month and the 17th day of year the Flood began. We do not know what this exact region or location is. I know that there have been and continue to be numerous supposed sightings of the ark. Also, there have been several expeditions to various locations of these sightings none of which have actually turned up
the ark. My own reading and research on the current search for Noah’s ark makes me very skeptical. Much of the published findings purporting to have located the ark are anything from outright frauds to suspect use of data. I would discourage any of you to give to such a project and to view with discernment and skepticism unless someone hauls the thing down out of the mountains.

Psalm 104 is a poetic celebration of the wonders of God’s creation. Verses 1-5 are a description of the original creation. Verses 6-9 are an obvious description of the Flood. Here, it is at the rebuke of God that the waters run away and take flight. It personifies what Genesis 8 more prosaically describes. Verses 8-9 are very important in that they describe the massive changes in the surface of the earth. The mountains are pressed up and the valleys sink down. The waters run off of them into the ocean basins. God sets the boundary through the continental shelves and shorelines to keep the waters in their place.

A very important question needs to be asked. If the earth was covered with a global flood, do we find evidence of this event? We are not here trying to prove the Bible true. Rather, we know that the great Flood would have permanent and observable consequences. So, we come to the data with an inspired, inerrant history through which we interpret our findings. I know that some of this will not be of great interest to some. But I want to take a moment to consider some faith building and opposition crushing observations from the world today.

**WE FIND A LAYER OF SEDIMENT ALL OVER THE GLOBE JUST ABOUT EVERYWHERE YOU DIG.** Sediment is layers of earth, deposited by moving water in rapid succession. Henry Morris points out that the depth, layering and composition of the sediment is exactly what you would expect from a flood and what you find in local floods.

**WE FIND FOSSILS ALL OVER THE WORLD.** Fossils can only be created by rapid engulfing and compacting so that the living creatures can be fossilized before they decay or are scavenged. In other words, fossils are formed only in cataclysmic climate change like the Flood.

**WE FIND TOPOGRAPHICAL FEATURES ACROSS THE WHOLE GLOBE THAT WERE OBVIOUSLY CARVED BY DEEP RUNNING WATERS.** I never cease to be in awe of the massive rock formations along I-80 when Esther and I have traveled out west. You can just imagine the waters running off from the Flood carving out these great, now empty, river beds. The Grand Canyon is an obvious example, not of millions of years of slow an deep erosion, but rather of the powerful carving of mighty river originally flowing along its length.
**WE FIND THE RESULTS OF MASSIVE KILL-OFF OF ANIMALS AND VEGETATION.** We find a lot of it in fossils. We also run much of modern technology on it. It is called oil. There is good science that says that the current vast deposits of oil were formed during the Flood. These oil fields and caverns were where the pre-Flood waters were stored. When God broke up the deeps and caused them to erupt all over the earth, in many places those caverns were filled with inrushing bodies, plants and animals, crushed under the great pressures of the Flood, forming oil.

There are many other geological features across the globe that indicate a global Flood has taken place. Some scientists try to attribute all of this to an ice age. While creation scientists agree that there was a time after the Flood when glaciers were much more extensive than they are now, they cannot account for many of the features.

This leaves a question: where did all that water go? While creation scientists have proposed many theories, the most reasonable one is based on the science of plate-tectonics and continental drift. I certainly don’t want to turn a sermon into more of a science lesson that I already have. But here are some of the key facts.

The surface/crust of the earth is a series of interlocking plates. The continents even today are measurably moving apart as the plates shift. This is called plate-tectonics. If you look at a globe carefully, particularly when you look at the continental shelves, not just the present shorelines, you can see that the east coast line of the Americas is roughly the same as the west coast of Europe and Africa. It seems that during the Flood, the continents rose and shifted apart to create the present geography.

Further, at one time the ocean basins were much shallower than they are now. As the continents were divided, pushed up and separated by catastrophic plate movement, the oceans floor sank down and great trenches and stress faults were created. As the waters of the Flood ran off from the mountains and the continents, our present oceans were created.

Lastly, the Antarctic is a vast continent covered with miles and miles of ice. In the initial wind and evaporation of the waters, the poles cooled much faster than the central regions and the ice packs were partially formed by the receding Flood waters.

Now, I realize that it is possible that God, through the wind that he caused to blow across the globe, may have supernaturally dried up the waters off the surface of the earth. In view of the text of the Bible and the corresponding evidence in world as we see it, I assert the following as absolutely true.
God decreed the Flood from eternity past, planning for it by storing the waters of the deep at creation for its day.

God directly caused the Flood to happen at the exact year and day it did as He had planned.

God caused the waters of the deep to burst forth and the rain to fall for forty days so that the great Flood covered all the globe and all the hills and mountains that existed then.

The Flood destroyed all breathing life, all humans, beasts, birds, and creeping things so that none, absolutely none remained alive except those in the ark.

Noah built a massive wooden boat, through which God preserved him, his family and all the animals by twos and the clean animals by sevens through the Flood.

The world after the Flood is very different in its geography and climate due to the Flood and God’s design.

D The Earth Dries (8:6-14)

Genesis 8:3 recorded that it took 150 total days for the waters to completely run off. Moses recorded quite a lot of detail of what Noah did during this period. In this section, we find Noah sending out the raven and the dove. Seventy-four days after the ark came to rest, the tops of the other mountains became visible. God had directed and planted the ark right where He wanted it for their safety and for the initial global migration. There on the mountain in Ararat, Noah awaits for the earth to dry up before he leaves the ark.

Forty days after the tops of the mountains become visible, Noah opens the window of the ark and sends out a raven. The raven is a carrion bird and able to survive in very adverse conditions. The implication here is that the raven came back and forth to the ark, but was able to spend long periods away. He also sent out a dove, possibly at the same time. The dove could find neither food nor a place to nest and returned to the ark.

Seven days later, Noah sent out the dove again. This time, when it returned, it brought an olive leaf with it. Noah now knew that the earth had dried enough for the vegetation to grow and thrive. After another seven days, he sent the dove out again. It did not return meaning that it had been able to find food and a nesting place. This took place twenty-two days from the end of the 150 day period which ended (by calculation) on the 17th day of the 12th month.

Two weeks later, on the first day of the New Year, Moses records that the earth was dried off enough to be inhabitable. Noah was able to see the dry land. He opened the roof of the ark so that it was open to the air. They stayed on the ark, apparently with it open like this, until the 27th day of the 2nd month. They had now been in the ark 377 days, or
1 year and 17 days (based on the 360 day year common to Moses’ day).

C The Remnant Leaves the Ark (8:15-19)
Once again we observe the union of wisdom and obedience. Noah has gone through this elaborate ritual with the raven and the dove to determine if the earth is habitable. He observes the mountains, then waters receding and finally that the ground is dry. He opens the windows, then the top. But he does not leave the ark until God tells him to.

In verses 15-17, God gives permission to leave the ark and instructions on how it is to be done. There is to be an orderly disembarkation. They are to bring out all the occupants of the ark by families. They are to release them into the wild so that they might migrate all over the face of the earth, reproduce and replenish the earth.

Out into the new creation comes the delivered remnant. Can you imagine the wonder and joy? So much of what we take as common and ordinary would have been new and changed. It was a marvelous and grand day.

Now that we have seen how the Bible tells the story of the Flood Year, let’s a summary and get a feel for the sequence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronology of the Flood</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Event</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting in the ark 7 days (7:7, 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Noah entered the ark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 7 days later: Rain began falling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water continued for 150 days (7:24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 40 days later: Heavy rains stopped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 110 days later: Prevailing waters receded and the ark rested on an Ararat mountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water receded in 150 days (8:3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 74 days later: Tops of mountains visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 40 days later: Raven sent out, and a dove sent out and returned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 7 days later: Dove sent out again and returned with a leaf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 7 days later: Dove sent out a third time and did not return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. 22 days later: Water receded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth dried in 70 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Noah saw dry land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Land completely dry, and Noah exited the ark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>377 days</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Dates specified in the Scriptures; other dates are implied.
B Noah Builds an Altar (8:20)

One author says that now Noah lifts up both propitiation and praise. He builds an altar. He built an ark to the saving of his household and the preserving of the animal kingdom. He now builds an altar in thanksgiving to God.

This is the first altar mentioned in the Scripture. While Moses has earlier implied sacrifice with covering of Adam and Eve with animal skins and the offerings of Cain and Abel, here is the first recorded altar. This is very important to note this. While it is possible that others built altars before him, God records through Moses this one as the first.

Noah offers several of the clean animals as a sacrifice. This is a great act of faith in God and understanding of God’s ways. Frankly, wouldn’t you have been reluctant to kill and sacrifice what you just spent a whole year ensuring made it through the Flood? Yet Noah takes them, kills them and lays on the altar. He then lights the altar so that the smoke of a burnt offering rises up to God.

A God Purposes to Preserve the World (8:21-22)

The sacrificial aroma from a heart of worship pleases the Lord God. Moses records that God smelled the aroma and purposes in His heart. He speaks to Himself. He deliberates in Himself and determines what He will do. Once again, we know that God has decreed all that comes to pass and that He is actively engaged with and interacts with what He has decreed.

Three important determinations are made here in relation to the earth which forms the grounds for the Noahic Covenant to follow. These three are internal determinations that God makes in reference to the created order, or what we think of as ecology. God’s public determinations that involve humanity will be the Covenant in chapter 9.

God will not again enact a judgment against or treat with contempt the ground because man’s heart is depraved and wicked from birth. The word “curse” here is not the same as in Genesis 3. God is not lifting the curse He enacted in Genesis 3. He is determining not to connect the earth (if I may say, ecology) with man’s unmitigated depravity. While the earth is subject to the curse until the renovation in the final day, God will deal with man’s sin in history without the kind of destructive disruption the Flood was.

God also determines not to strike down every living creature as He did in the Flood. Again, this is evidence that happened since He determines not to do it again. The purpose of God’s heart here has to do with the animal kingdom.

God determines to maintain the ecological cycles and equilibrium. He establishes what they will be in the antediluvian world. He also determines that they will be an unending cycle as long as the earth remains.

These three determinations then provide a predictable and stable world for man to live in.
The future judgment of the wicked is as sure as the past judgment in the Flood. God may wait with amazing patience until that Day of Judgment. But His wrath is being stored up. It will come. It will sweep the wicked away into eternal punishment in hell. Be warned. Flee from the wrath to come. Humble yourself before God. Call upon for mercy.

The righteous on the earth who are graced by God will obediently walk with God and work for God. Faith does not lead us to live of ease. Faith brought Noah an enormous task, a grave responsibility. And so it does for us. Whether believing God in the details of daily living or believing God for the work of the ministry, the promises we believe are delivered through the obeying work we do.

We have such hope and confidence in God who has provided for us a continuing stability of times and seasons. But even more, to see the care of God over Noah and his family in the midst of terrible evil and then massive judgment should encourage us to even more rest in Him. In the midst of a wicked generation and great upheaval, our God is our refuge and our rest.

The ark of deliverance and salvation during the outpouring of the wrath of God points us to the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross.

He is the place of shelter from the wrath of God. There is no other one who has taken on Himself our wrath in our place. He is our ark of safety, our propitiation, our righteousness.

He is the kophar, the covering over that seals us for the day of redemption. The pitch was a covering that sealed. The kophar was also the covering or lid on the Ark of the Covenant in the holy of holies. It is his blood shed and sprinkled that covered the sins under the Old Covenant and washes away all our sins now.

He is the door, the one and only door of entry to salvation. He is the only way to God and the only entry into the place of salvation. There is no other way. All other ways are false ways, ones that will lead to destruction. But He is the true door, the true gate, the one and only true way.

God has chosen whom to deliver and does save them. Noah and his family are chosen to be delivered through the Flood. God’s purpose, promise, providence and provision do not fail nor are frustrated. What God told Noah, God actually accomplished. I am so glad to know that what God has promised He is able to perform and will until the Final Day. So entrust yourself to Him.

Christ is the bridge between the Old and New Creation. Noah and his family entered the ark from the old creation and emerged in the new. The ark was the way between. Jesus brought to naught the old creation where sin abounded and has brought into being the new creation where grace abounds. We are awaiting the day when the new creation begun in our hearts is brought to complete fulfillment. What a day of praise and thanksgiving that will be.

This is what Christ’s work has done. There is condemnation and cleansing. His work on the cross has punished our sins and it has purified us from our sins. O, believe and bow to Him today.
Appendix

Thanks to Dr. J Osgood writing for *Answers in Genesis* for the following dating of the flood calculating back from Christ’s birth. Note that there is some discussion of a possible 50 year difference between Exodus 12:40 and Galatians 3:17.

[Paul wrote in Galatians] that the Israelites left Egypt to return to the promised land 430 years after God gave the promise to Abraham... According to Acts 7:4 and Genesis 12:1-4, Abraham was 75 years old when God gave him the promise and in the same year his father Terah was 205 years old and Abraham was born when Terah was 130 years of age (Gen.11:26-33). The statements of genealogy in Genesis 11:10-26, are father-son statements and link Abraham to Noah’s son, Shem. The statements list the persons by name. Their year of birth against their father’s age is listed and their father is named. These chronologies do not have missing generations; there are no gaps. If we add up the figures mentioned between Shem’s 100th year (Gen. 11:10) and Abraham (Gen. 11:26) we get 350 years. Since 9 names are mentioned it is 350 years +/- 9 (9 margins of error of up to 1 year each). Genesis 11:10 tells us that Shem was 100 years old, 2 years after the Flood had finished. When was Noah’s Flood? 1,981 years to AD 0 plus 967 years to the founding of Solomon’s Temple plus 480 years to the end of the Exodus plus 430 years to the promise to Abraham plus 75 years to Abraham’s birth plus 350 years to Shem’s 100th birthday plus 2 years to the Flood. The Biblical data places the Flood at 2304 BC +/- 11 years.
Into the New Creation
Genesis 9

Introduction
How do we who are of the new creation live in the shadows and remnant of the old creation? Paul writes, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” [2 Corinthians 5:16-17, ESV]

Our text this morning reminds us that even the greatest of saints can still sin. So, out into the new creation steps Noah, his family and all the animal kingdom. Having offered a propitiation and praise offering that pleases God, Noah now begins to move into the new world. God has determined not to destroy life and to sustain the environmental order. Now, that determination to spare life is carried out in two important relationships: Noah and His God; Noah and His Family

Noah and His God (v.1-17)
When God determines what He will do, He then moves to implement that plan. In this section, God speaks to Noah. He first blesses through the giving of commands then speaks in the making of a covenant.

The Commands to Noah (v.1-7)
Notice how this section is book ended by “be fruitful and multiply” highlighting its theme. In the face of the great destruction and loss of life in the Flood, God here gives commands that have at their core the honor and value He has given to life.

For the Propagation of Human Life (v.1-4)
God first set of commands are aimed at encouraging the proliferation of life, both animal and human.

Noah and his descendents are expected to populate the earth. They are to be fruitful, multiply and to fill the earth. A part of the dominion mandate given to Adam is here repeated. Noah is already exercising dominion. Now, the obligation is to fill the earth with people. The command here is not only to reproduce, but also to disperse. The “fill the earth” has the idea of spreading out over the whole face of the earth. This will be important to remember when we come to Babel.

The animal kingdom will now fear (or better, be in terror) of humans. Since there will be a great number of animals who will multiply and spread, they would constitute a real threat to mankind. God here changes the relationship between man and animals giving them a natural, in-born fear of man.
Permission is also given for mankind to eat meat. It is quite evident from the Genesis account and from the food stores taken onto the ark, that before the Flood, God had not granted permission to eat meat. This does not mean that humanity had not; it is almost certain that some of the violence filling the earth before the Flood would have spilled over into man killing and eating animals. So man may have disobeyed God before, but now God graciously grants permission to eat meat. I want to remind you that there is nothing spiritual about being a vegetarian. Not eating meat is covered under liberty, but it is the limitation of being the weaker brother.

Let us also take to heart Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 4:1-5 where he writes, 

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from meats foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. [ESV].

In the permission, there is also an important prohibition. When eating flesh, it was to be properly drained and prepared. This permission and prohibition would be expanded in the Mosaic Law into the kosher food regulations.

**For the Protection of Human Life**

(v.5-7)

God has just destroyed all life, except for Noah and his family. God has also given permission for mankind to eat meat. In this context, God now gives commands that are designed to protect human life.

*God’s Requirement* is that is any human or animal that takes a human life should be punished. There is a reckoning to be made. God will require that from both animals and man. Here is the institution of sword of justice in the hands of human government. God authorizes capital punishment for capital crimes. Here is the means to restrain the sin of man as expressed in the murder by Cain and the side-spread violence before the Flood. If an animal or a human murders a human, then punishment in kind must take place.

I cannot but note that at one level, animals and humans are put in the same category. They are both culpable and punishable before God. However, they are also clearly placed in different orders of being. Animals may be slain and eaten. But human life is different. A man must not be murdered. Human life is protected; human life is to be honored and respected.

*God’s Reason* is given in the short poem in verse 6. Human life is protected because man is made in God’s image. The difference between man and animals is not self-awareness or soul – it is that we are image bearers. Murder then is a striking out at the image of God in man. It is a striking out against God. We preserve and protect human life, not because it is sacred, but because it represents the life and image of God.
So God puts into place commands which are to organize corporate life together and orients that life towards God. Humans, made in the image of God, their life is to be honored by propagation, provision and protection.

The Covenant with Noah (v.8-17)

Now that God has commanded Noah, He also covenants with Noah. Here is what is often called the Noahic Covenant.

Its Significance

The Noahic Covenant is important for two reasons: it initiates and illustrates covenant making.

*Its Place* in the Scriptures is to establish the category of covenant making and keeping as foundational to relating to God. This is the first recorded covenant in the Bible. It is designed to introduce God's people in all generations, to being related to God through a covenant relationship. Other metaphors are used as well, like family, nation, etc. There is lots of debate as to whether there are covenants earlier in history than the Noahic Covenant. Some would say that like altars which obviously were used earlier in history than their first recording here in Genesis 8, covenants existed but are just now being revealed. I have serious questions about that, but this is neither the time nor place to get into those discussions. In my mind, we should only have as formal covenants what the Bible names as formal covenants. Theological reconstruction of covenants, not specifically called such in the text itself, is probably attempting to take one area of relating to God and trump it with another metaphor. In spite of all that discussion, clearly, the Noahic Covenant is the first covenant in the Bible directly so called. God says, for the first time in inspired, inerrant revelation, “I will make a covenant…”

*Its Purpose* in the Mosaic account is to show how God provides for the welfare of all that He has made. In the commands, life is to be honored and recognized among men. This covenant then serves as a model of how God also will preserve and protect life. Having experienced the judgment of God and moving into a new world, Noah and his family are promised and are assured that kind of judgment will not fall again. As a result, Israel, in hearing of this covenant with Noah, gains confidence in God and hope for the future as they receive covenant promises in the midst of their own moving from the old world of Egypt into the new world of Canaan. That God makes and keeps His promises, often in spectacularly greater ways than the covenant itself might seem, should encourage us and cause us to move forward into the new with faith in Him.

Its Signatories

Covenants also have the people or parties to the covenants. They are its signatories. They are those who are related through the covenant. The Noahic Covenant is a unilateral covenant in which God simply declares what He will do. God is the initiator and guarantor of this covenant. He comes to man to make these promises for the good and blessing of mankind.
Noah receives the promise on behalf of all, both mankind and the animal kingdom (v.9-10). The covenant is received by Noah who represents all mankind. Through Noah, all of us receive and participate in this covenant. God promises what He does through Noah to us. This is a very important concept in the Bible. We all recognize the power of representatives to act on our behalf. We do this with lawyers and our elected government offices. God carries out His divine plan on behalf of His people through Divinely appointed representatives. They may receive a covenant that is later transmitted to and accepted by generations not yet born. In some cases, their actions are also seen has having a “on the behalf of others” aspect.

**Its Stipulations**

Covenants in the Bible also have stipulations. These are the elements of the promise relationship where the content, the conditions and the consequences of the covenant are articulated. The Noahic Covenant is primarily an unconditional covenant. God simply promises what He will or will not do. In this case, God promises never to destroy the all life again by a flood (mabbul) nor to destroy all the earth by a flood.

I am struck immediately by the fact that this covenant is given in the context of judgment. If there had been no judgment on sin, then the covenant would have little meaning. It reminds us that our redemption is very precious to us because of God’s great wrath against our sin and the judgment that will surely take place.

There is some discussion as to whether verses 1-7 are an integral part of the covenant. If so, then there are requirements placed on those to whom the covenant is given. That would be, in other covenants, the commands or conditions of the covenant. While I have distinguished between the commands and the covenant following the structure of the text, there is deep and unifying theme between these two sections.

**Its Sign**

As a visible, perpetual reminder or seal of the once given promise, a covenant usually has its seal. We exchange rings at weddings a visible tokens or seals of the marriage covenant and vows. We do so because we have learned from the Bible that God gives seals and tokens to remind all of us of His promises and our responsibilities.

The sign then of the Noahic Covenant is the rainbow in the clouds. It does not matter whether rainbows existed before the Flood. What matters is that God has taken rainbows and vested them with this significance. Rainbows remind us of God’s judgment and His promise. The rainbow, usually associated with rain and sun, is supposed to now point us to God, to all that He performs and all that He promises.

The rainbow is interesting as a theme in Scripture. Ezekiel saw a rainbow over the throne of God as giving hope in the midst of exile (Ezekiel 1:28). The rainbow is also seen around the throne of God in Revelation 4:3. The mighty angel of Revelation 10:1, probably the Lord Jesus, is described as
having a rainbow about His head. In all these cases, the rainbow reminds us that the sovereign God has promised to judge, but not to utterly annihilate. He will deliver His people out of wrath and bring them safely through to home, safely out of the old and gloriously home into the new.

The covenants that will follow in the Bible, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic, the New (Everlasting) Covenant, develop the multi-faceted ways in which God relates to His people. Through the covenants, we hear God’s unyielding and unending commitment to deliver His people, to bless them and to bring them into relationship with Himself so that they respond with obeying faith and deep delight.

Noah and His Family  
(v.17-28)

The placing of these two accounts next to one another and even the fact of this account has had commentators scratching their heads. While we might be surprised at the open exposure of Noah’s failure, we are graphically reminded that sin is pervasive and it is powerful, even in the new order, the new creation.

Moses now turns to the unfolding story of history flowing from Noah and his sons. The aim here is to show how the nations developed (v.18-19). Noah’s three sons are the root from which all the nations came and dispersed. Immediately, Canaan is highlighted for Israel so that they will be careful to note what happens and what it means. The focus of the aim is to locate the line of Israel and to show why the Canaanites were Israel’s mortal enemies.

There are many important things to consider as we think through this text. If you will allow me, I would like to walk through it and then, under the last point, try to deal with some bothersome questions this raises.

Noah’s Problem  
(v.20-24)

Moses takes us directly from Noah standing as the great recipient of God’s covenantal promise and regent over the new world to Noah lying drunk and naked in his tent. Noah begins to be a man of the soil. Allen P. Ross points out this word in this form in Genesis, begins, takes on an ominous note. It introduces decline occurring in the midst of normal, ordinary life. Noah simply begins to be a farmer. But more than that, he becomes a man of the earth, earthy. He plants a vineyard. There is nothing evil here either. God Himself is a vinedresser and His people are a vineyard. Juice and wine are elements of celebration and emblems of joy.

But Noah has been fooled by the wine. It has mocked him. He has drunk too much and is now inebriated to the point that he throws off his robe and is lying down naked in his tent. Again, Ross is helpful here in that this is obviously not at a time or in a place where there is an expectation of privacy. The language here is not just unclothed, but immodestly exposed. So here is the decline and degradation of Noah.

Then, the story moves forward with one of his sons. Again, Moses is making a point by the indirect, through Canaan reference to Ham, signaling why this narrative is here. Ham goes into the tent and sees the nakedness of his father. This is not casual but intentional. There is a sense that Ham went in with a purpose to
see the degradation of his father, probably not expecting that he would be naked. However, he comes out and tells his brothers. Now remember, these are not teenagers. These are grown men with wives. The Hebrew seems to imply that Ham’s actions here are wicked – that he went in, that he looked the way he did and the way he told his brothers. In other words, this is not, “Ooops”. This is, “Yeah, dad is such a spiritual giant. He is lying in there drunk out of his mind and exposed for all to see.” From the consequences and from the contrast of the brother’s actions, we know that what Ham did was very wrong. Ham has acted, possibly out of rebellion, but certainly with the intent to dishonor and disrespect his father.

It has to hit us how differently Shem and Japheth respond. They take great pains to not violate God’s Law, to honor their father and to act as a rebuke to their brother. The Mosaic Law has much to say about modesty. It is emphatic that the nakedness of a father or mother is not to be exposed to children. We can only surmise that Noah and his sons know God’s mind on this. They know they are to honor their father. They know that true love and filial honor will hide or cover sin. So, they take a garment, drape it between them and go into the tent backwards. They cover their father, going to great lengths not to see him exposed.

Moses records that Noah slept off his alcohol and then found out what had happened to him. When he is sober, he is told what happened. When he does, as the prophet-priest of his family, he begins to speak an oracle by the Holy Spirit. Now, some have thought because of the phrase, “[Noah] knew what his youngest son had done to him” that something sexual is being implied here. Some have gone as far as to suggest that Ham may have committed a homosexual incest with his father while Noah was in this drunken stupor. Others have suggested, using cross references to the Law using the phrase “saw the nakedness” that Ham had gone in and committed incest with Noah’s wife. The problem here is that it is reading way too much into the text. The phrase saw his nakedness here is different from the phrase expose his nakedness used in the Mosaic Law as a euphemism for sex. Further, if Moses wants to show how degraded the Canaanites were from the beginning, why not simply be plain about it? I think the commentators are struggling to make Ham’s sin something we would all agree is heinous. The problem here is our own distorted sense of what is wicked and what is OK sin. I will deal with this in just a moment.

**Noah’s Prophecy**

(v.25-27)

Noah speaks an oracle, a prophecy. Immediately following a Covenant with God and a moral failure by Noah and his son, we have a powerful introduction to the bless and curse motif in the Old Covenant. When one sins, there is a curse. When one obeys, there is blessing. The juxtaposition, the immediacy of these two things must grab our attention. In the midst of fallenness and failure, God’s covenant blessing and cursing sets the trajectory for the history of peoples.

**The Curse on Canaan**

The curse is pronounced on Canaan because of Moses’ purpose in writing Genesis. In other words, what is recorded here is what Noah said, but it is recorded so that Israel might understand who the Canaanites are. If Israel is going to go into the land and toss out the wicked Canaanites, here is part of the
rationale. Also, the curse and blessing here shows how the character of an individual can become the character of a people. Moses uses this motif at the end of the book as well when the character of the sons of Jacob are identified with the later character and conduct of the tribe. Finally, the curse on Canaan, Ham’s youngest son is a reflection of the sin of Ham, Noah’s youngest son.

Canaan is cursed with servitude. He will not only be just a servant, but the servant of servants. The construct is both showing his abject slavery and its emphatic surety. Then, he reiterates in each of the blessings on the other boys. Canaan will be their servant. So, when Israel comes to the promised land, they are entering what God has given them and also are carrying out God’s plan and purpose for the Canaanites as well.

God warned Israel about the depravity of the Canaanites in Leviticus 18:2-6 in language that is much like that of the sin of Ham. After a long list of lewd and depraved sins in verses 7-23, God says that these very evils are what the people they were to drive out were doing. Ross helpfully points out that the Canaanites were enslaved to all kinds of sexual sins which are described with language intended to invoke Ham’s sin. Thus, as Moses is giving the Torah, he is creating internal connections in the text that helped the people to abhor the sins they were to avoid.

The Blessing on Shem and Japheth

Look carefully at the blessing in verse 26. It says, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem.” In this song or Psalm, praise is given to God for the blessing He bestows. But even more startling than that, God is blessed in the blessing of Shem. God so connects His own happiness and joy with His purposes and plans for Shem that He is blessed by Shem. Delitzsch says, “[Yahweh] makes Himself a name in becoming the God Shem and thus entwines His name with of Shem, which means the name.” [cited in Creation and Blessing, Allen Ross, p. 218].

The blessing on Japheth comes through the form a prayer in the song. The blessing is that of enlargement and expansion. Japheth will have many descendants, much territory and great achievement. He is portrayed in the safe and secure relationship of family and guest in ones home. And Canaan will be his servant as well. When we talk in chapters 10-11 about the determination and the dispersion of the nations, we will see who their descendents become.

One final note, God uses His personal name, “Lord” with Shem and His transcendent name with Japheth. Yet those who dwell in the common tabernacle of Shem will know the God as Lord. Through these we are taken to the Lord Jesus who is the true Shem, the true Israelite. All blessed gentiles will dwell in family relationship with the Lord, all who are in Christ, in His Tabernacle.
Lessons

Let’s think together on some very important lessons that the people of God are to learn from this.

Redemptive history selects events to serve thematic purposes.

I come back to this again. The narrative here selects and develops the stories in order to make a redemptive historical point. We are not just focusing on the folly of Noah, the failure of Ham and the humble wisdom of Shem and Japheth. We are seeing the events through which God exposed the character of the three boys and set the course of nations in motion.

We have few categories today that help us see how terrible Ham’s sin was.

What’s the big deal? Most of you have struggled a bit with this to try to imagine what Ham did that is so bad. The Bible however treats what Ham did as very sinful. So we do not have to try to say that more is going on here so that we make it fit our categories. We need to adjust our understanding of immodesty, parental dishonor and tale-bearing so that we are gripped by the sinfulness of these sins.

Small sins may have far-reaching consequences.

We also struggle with the proportion here. How can such small actions have such enormous consequences? How can the future shape of nations and peoples arise from 2 simple acts, one of disobedience and one of obedience? God’s economy and way of doing things is rooted in this principle. The actions of Adam take down the whole human race. The disobedience of Ham affects all his progeny. The redemptive work of one man, the Lord Jesus Christ, accomplishes salvation for His people.

The Bible has a high regard for sobriety, modesty and parental honor.

This message needs to come through loud and clear. Drunkenness, immodesty, indecent dress and lifestyles, dishonoring parents all are symptoms of paganism. Take note, all of you, but listen to me young people. God prizes the sobriety, modesty and careful, obedient wisdom shown by Shem and Japheth. God abhors the drunkenness and immodesty of Noah and the parental dishonor shown by Ham, even as an adult. You need to think about this. You need to decide whose values and whose approval you seek. You need to consider your ways. May God give you a heart to hate evil and love good. May God give you grace to be controlled by the Spirit, modest and discreet in your attitudes and attire while honoring your parents for the glory of God.

May God make us serious about sin in our own lives. May we guard against the kind of attitudes and actions that brought such disgrace on Noah and sin by Ham with consequences for all. In all this, come to Jesus. Come to Him for cleansing, renewal and grace to be ever pleasing to Him.

Conclusion
The Spread of the Nations
Genesis 10-11

Introduction Pagans are not people with no religion. Pagans are people with many religions. While westerners do not usually think of themselves as “pagan”, in this sense, they are. They have many gods. Even many people who call themselves Christian actually serve a god, but not the true God, the God of the Bible. Basically, pagan gods are like their creators, are needy and can be manipulated. This is the god of many people in churches today. Their god needs them, is just like them just bit bigger, and responds to manipulation. So, their god provides money or health in exchange for giving or prayer or even just believing in them.

Why does this matter? Why start a message with such an unfriendly and startling assertion? Because our text today is going to tell us bit of where religious paganisms in all its forms comes from. Moses wrote this text, partially to expose as false the pagan religions around Israel. I do not want us sitting here thinking that it really has very little impact on us. Our civilization and our technology hide our basic paganism. People all around us are bowing down to all kinds of gods. So we need a text like this to tell us where this confusion of languages, peoples and nations came from. We must pay attention to this Babel, who is the harlot mother of all false religion and whose consort is the father of lies, Satan.

The Division of the Nations (Ch 10)
Seventy descendents of Noah’s sons are listed here comprising the tribes, nations, peoples and languages that surrounded Israel during the early days of the trek to the Promised Land when Moses wrote Genesis. The point here is not to establish descendents, but to show how the major nation families came into being in the division of the nations.

This is an extraordinarily elegant piece of literature. I know, you look at it a say, “what?” Here is a good example of how the Hebrew form drives the function. There is a carefully crafted interplay of sets of words and structure of thought that Moses uses as a major transition in the narrative. In this section, Moses bridges the past to the (his) present.

First, each unit is built on a structure that looks like the following parallel chiasm.

Heading: The sons of ____ were… This section establishes the first generation under each of the sons of Noah.

Expansion: The sons of those sons were… Here relationship is developed either with a sons of or with a descended from.

Colophon: These were… according to their lands, language, families and nations.

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Second, the closing or colophon divides the nations by means of anthropological, linguistic, political and geographical criteria. The list for Japheth is different from the others: Japheth is lands, languages, families and nations whereas the other two are families, languages, land and nations. Through this, Moses explains why some of the names in the list are widely varied as to what they refer to: some are cities, some are political boundaries, others are families and tribes, and some refer to language groups. These biblical divisions reflect much more the differences between those Israel felt were her allies and those who were her enemies.

But this is not a lesson in historical geography. As always in Genesis, the list was included for a theological reason—to relate the chosen line of Shem to the other non-elect lines. The genealogy of the non-elect is always placed before the chosen line: Cain before Seth (chs. 4–5), Ishmael before Isaac (ch. 25), Esau before Jacob (chs. 36–37). The choice of Shem and the rejection of Ham has already been intimated (9:25–27), and this is confirmed in this chapter…

The Line of Japheth

The line of Japheth is comprised largely of those tribes and peoples who lived along the west coastlands and north into modern Europe. Some of the names are familiar to us from history. The popular identification of Gomer with Germany and Magog with Russia simply will not bear out Biblically. Most of the nations here are along the north and west Mediterranean rim.

Gomer represents the Cimmerians; Magog was somewhere in the north (Ezk. 38:2); Madai represents the Medes in northern Iran, Javan the Ionian Greeks, and Tubal, Meshech and Tiras have been identified with Turkey. Ashkenaz represents the Scythians, and Togarmah was a district north of Carchemish. Elishah was probably in Crete. Tarshish was a Mediterranean city, possibly Carthage. Kittim is identified with Cyprus and Rodanim with Rhodes (the Dodanim, the alternative reading, may come from the Aegean).

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The Line of Ham

The line of Ham is comprised largely of those tribes and peoples who settled the eastern and southern regions of Mesopotamia. Among their nations are some of Israel’s closest neighbors and fiercest enemies. The first major grouping, the descendants of Cush, populate the African continent including modern Sudan and Ethiopia and the Arabian Peninsula of the Persian Gulf.

In an important interruption of the flow of “descended from”, Moses gives three who fathered or begat. These are very important, one because of his place in world history and the others because of their place in Israel’s immediate history.

The first use of begotten is in reference to Nimrod. His name means, “Let us rebel.” He is the first to establish an imperial world power. He founded the mystery religion from which all false religions are derived. He is identified as a mighty hunter before the Lord. This is often the way the great Assyrian kings represented themselves, great hunters of men who were to be feared. The Bible highlights him as the founder of several of the greatest cities in the ancient world. He founded Babylon, Nineveh and Calah, along with other major cities in their lands. These three mighty cities became the centers of culture and tyrannical rule around the Fertile Crescent.

The second use of begotten is in reference to Mizraim or Egypt. The peoples and regions of what later became the Egyptian empire are listed here. Again, Moses is highlighting the near history of Israel as they have just left Egypt and its terrible slavery and slaughter.

The last use is in reference to the Canaanites. All the tribes, peoples and language groups that occupied the Promised Land are listed here. Their names will become familiar to Israel in the wilderness wanderings and in the conquest of the Land.

The Line of Shem

Finally, Moses gives those from whom Israel herself would descend. The most important here are Arpachshad as the Jewish line and Eber, from whose name comes the term Hebrew. Moses also tells us that the earth was divided during the days of Peleg. Given that the next account if that of Babel where the nations were disperse, it is generally accepted that this is the event indicated. Thus, the dispersion would have occurred five generations after Noah, between 131 years and 300 years after the Flood (see Genesis 11:10-18).

The closing colophony for the whole section reminds us that this table of nations not only gives the roots of those surrounding Israel, but also from which all the nations of the earth derived. So this leaves some very important questions:

Why are there are so many languages if everyone came from Noah’s family?

Why are there so many religions if Noah knew the Lord and taught his sons?

This is what chapter 11 is all about. Babel is about the confusion of worship that leads to the confusion of language.
The Dispersion of the Nations  
(11:1-9)

Like the Flood, this is a famous story in the Bible. Isolating it from its context and not noting its structure will ruin Moses’ purpose for its writing. Again, I am deeply indebted to Allen Ross and to Bruce Waltke for helping me so much with this section.

Moses uses both the structure of the text and the sound of the Hebrew in order to give this shape and substance.

Let’s begin with *THE STRUCTURE*. It is an antithetical chiasm. It is not quite as obvious in English as it is in the Hebrew. There interplay of the words and where they sit in the verbal cadence of the sentences gives rise to the following structure.

A All the earth had one language
B Settled to there
C Spoke to one another
D Come, let us make
E Let us build for our selves
   F A city and a tower
   G The Lord came down to see
   f the city and the tower
   e The humans built
   d Come, let us confuse
   c Not understand one another
b Spread from there
a Confused the languages of all the earth

This might look contrived in English, but when the linguist lays this out using transliteration of the key Hebrew words, it is plain to the eye and ear.

Let’s also consider how *THE SOUND* of the words reinforces this structure and the substance of Moses’ point.

The play on the words *babel* and *balel* throughout this text give us the thrust of the message: the construction on earth is answered by the destruction from heaven; men build, but God pulls down. The fact the man’s words are turned lyrically and used by God give a sense of irony, “God sings with the people while He works against them.”

Fokkelman stresses the same point with the words *sem*, *sam*, and *samayim* in the Hebrew. To bring everlasting fame (*sem*) they unite in one spot (*sam*) as the base of their efforts to obtain that fame by reaching up to the heavens (*samayim*), the abode of God. God responds from heaven (*samayim*) and scatters them from there (*missam*). (Cited by and adapted from Ross).

Now let’s think about the story and unpack it for our profit.
Their Rebellion (v.2-4)
The narrative here shows how this rebellion against God occurred in the normal course of life. They were all joined as one people in language and custom (v.1). They moved together from place to place, finally settling in the rich land of Shinar, in the heart of the Fertile Crescent (v.2). Here, the land and the location allowed them to settle and to prosper.

The rebellion seems to begin as they prosper and to advance in technology. Now this might not seem like much to us, but the kiln baked brick that was the façade on the ziggurats of Babylon is famous for its durability and its beauty. It was a magnificent achievement in ceramic. They see what they are able to accomplish and their hearts are lifted up in pride and self-sufficiency.

Then their rebellion grows. They resolve to build a city and a tower, or ziggurat. As indicated earlier, this was a system of cities creating a vast city-state, a megalopolis. The Babylonian ziggurats were stepped temples built with stone, backfilled with clay and dirt, covered in their brick and surrounded by buildings for the religious and political purposes. In these brief words, Moses points an accusatory and condemning figure to all that this rebellion grew into. Nimrod, who founded this city and who may have headed this rebellion, founded not only a massive imperial rule but also established the formal religious system from which all false religions come (See Revelation 17:5). The tower was built not for man to access heaven, but rather as a monument to the gods of the heavens as the gate of the gods. This was to be the stairway for the gods to come down and interact with men. This developed in Babylon into a system of priests and priestesses, worship of the stars, invisible spiritual beings and with the elevation of a virgin as the mother of the gods. Moses then is condemning all the false religions which have developed from Babel.

Their evil motivations are brought to light. They will build the city and the tower to make themselves a name and to keep themselves together. Here is their pride and their disobedience. It is clear that Moses intends for us to connect these with the accounts in chapter 10 to go out over all the earth. They intend to stay together, build a huge city-fort, erect the stairway to the heavens, concourse with the gods and become the mighty in their deeds and in their fame.

God’s Response (v.5-7)
In a wonderful piece of irony, the true God has to come down to this great high tower to see what is going on. What is supposed to reach up to the heavens as a stairway for the gods, the true God has to come down to see it and to check it out!

God evaluates the implications of their unity and their ingenuity. With one language and culture, their religious, political and technical achievements will be staggering. It is not enough that man will rebel in pride, but he will bend all his energy and intelligence to create religions, gods, cultures and technologies, not to serve the Lord God as an expression of man’s assigned dominion, but to usurp and displace God. Romans 1 gives us the interpretation of what goes on. Man begins with knowing God and truth, suppresses, substitutes and speculates through a series of exchanging truth for lies, worship of God for worship of crea-
ture with the consequence that God hands them over to depraved desires and beliefs.

So God intervenes here in a history altering way. God breaks up their unity and sets enormous diversity and disunity in motion. He confounds their languages. He fills people’s minds and tongues with words that are new and different. Now, it is obvious that God did this within the scope of the three major streams given in Chapter 10. So people who could communicate together will be seeking each other out. Think about the fear and frustration in the hours, days and weeks that followed God’s action.

The Results

The effect of confounding the languages is given in these two verses. God is seen as the active agent in confusing the languages and causing the dispersion that He originally commanded. Moses is clear that this is impetus to the great migration of the people groups across the face of the whole earth.

Through languages God causes diversity in cultures and nationalism to come into being. Clearly, globalism, one-worldism and a world-wide single language are not what God intends for this time. God restrains man’s potential for sin through this kind of division, dispersion and diversification. The present ability to overcome many of these barriers is contributing to the global increase in both knowledge and wickedness.

In a final stab of irony, Moses reminds Israel of two important things. The great effort to build the city of man and the tower of the gods is left off. And the name of the place is called Babel, confusion, because God there confounded the efforts of man by confusing his language. Ah, mighty man. What confusion his religions, his politics, his technical achievements are when they are opposed by God.

As one writer put it, “By portraying an unfinished tower, by dispersing the builders, and by in essence making fun of the mighty name of Babylon, the text functions effectively to repudiate the culture from which the people [of] Israel sprang.” [E. Fox, cited by Waltke, Genesis, p.183.) It also stands to repudiate all of the heirs of that rebellion and religion, whether clearly pagan and pseudo-Christian.
The Descendents of Blessing (v.10-26)
In this next paragraph, we come once more to a genealogical table that makes up a whole Tol®Dot or section of Genesis. Rather than go through this in any detail, let’s think about it this way.

The Shape of the Text
This genealogy is structured as a parallel to Genesis 5. It looks like the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genesis 5</th>
<th>Genesis 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>[Noah]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>Shem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enosh</td>
<td>Arphaxad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenan</td>
<td>Shelah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahalel</td>
<td>Eber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared</td>
<td>Peleg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enoch</td>
<td>Reu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methuselah</td>
<td>Serug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamech</td>
<td>Nahor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Terah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shem, Ham Japheth</td>
<td>Abram, Nahor, Haran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canaan (9:18)</td>
<td>Lot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are ten generations represented in each account. Noah’s name is assumed and provides the balance. While Luke 3:36 adds an additional name in this genealogy, many linguists agree that it appears to be an addition in the Greek possibly to provide the balance we have by supplying Noah as the first. So they are constructed deliberately with a verbal symmetry, one to show the time between creation and the Flood, the other to show time between the Flood and the call of Abraham. Between these three benchmark events, Moses records the generations and the years so as to know when those events were.

The Sense of the Text
Two important things are being communicated here.

Like Genesis 5, the years between the Flood and the call of Abraham can be calculated. Once again, you simply add up the years in the begat line. That this is one of Moses’ purposes is clear when he tells us exactly how long after the Flood before Shem fathers Arphaxad. One of the fascinating effects of this genealogy and its historical accuracy is that Noah died when Abraham was over 50 years old. This puts Noah, Job and Abraham all living fairly near one another around the same time!

Unlike Genesis 5, we do not have the total years of a person’s life nor the statement that “he died”. Of course, they did die. And they did live as long after they fathered the son as is recorded. In Genesis 5 Moses is showing the growing affects of the curse in death, the death of individuals and the massive death in the Flood. He is moving toward judgment. But here, Moses is showing the effect of the blessing in life. He is moving toward the great blessing for all the world, Abraham, whom every child of God counts as our spiritual father.
One writer helped me see three important lessons that we should learn from this section of God’s Word. (Ross, Creation and Blessing, p. 230).

All the nations are one family of man for we all descended from one family. There is only one human race, not races. We are all tied together through ancestry, not to some family of monkeys, but to a remnant family spared through judgment.

The human race is divided by language, peoples, tribes, territory and politics, all of which is God’s design for diversity and as a limitation. God had a good purpose in restraining sin and the inventiveness of people through a unified expression of language and religion. Thus, even the pluralism of our world serves God’s ends and aims.

The people groups of the world all share, even to today, the cursing and blessing of God’s plan given in the oracle of Noah. The dispersion of the nations and their relationships to one another all reflect the outworking of the sovereign plan of God.

In Christ, the true stairway to heaven is erected. He is the only true connection between God and man, between heaven and earth. That connection comes not through the pride of man, but through the humility of the Lord God who, in Christ, comes down, all the way down to a cross-kind of death.

At Pentecost, God moves through the gospel to transcend and overcome these language and cultural barriers. The Holy Spirit enabled the Apostles to speak in languages unknown to them so that the gospel can also disperse through diverse languages and cultures. This world wide sending of the gospel calls out God’s people to form a new people group who may yet be diverse, but are not divided. Their very diversity brings richness to their relationship to Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, Christians speaking different languages still understand one another.

True unity now comes for us as Christians, not through some effort of human invention or construction, but rather as an effect of the Holy Spirit. He has brought us true union. We express that union through love, compassion, service and sacrifice for one another.

The city of God from heaven, the bride of Christ, the church, will one day overcome the city of man on earth. The New Jerusalem will cast down the old Babylon. That day will come when the gospel has run its full course and the Lord Jesus comes. Then, in true union, all of God’s people from all the ages will stand and with one voice, adoringly worship our Redeemer and Ruler.

May God haste that glorious day.
The Follower and the Fearful
Genesis 11:27 – 12:20

Introduction
Advances and obstacles. Three steps forward, two steps back. This is so often our experience in life. We seem to move forward in our family, our finances, our work; then a setback occurs and we are trying to recover ground. Moses is using this idea to help us understand redemptive history. In doing so, he is highlighting the sovereign purposes and plans of God that God presses forward by His divine providences. And so we will see this throughout the rest of Genesis. There will be stunning advances and alarming obstacles.

This advance and obstacle is set in three scenes. Each scene is a movement, a trip, a migration.

The first scene gives us the migration of Abraham’s family from a pagan center of culture to a pagan center of religion (Ur to Haran).

The second scene follows the initial obedient movement from the place where sin abounds to the place where blessing is promised.

The third scene shows the sad drift in the midst of hardship into deceit and difficulty. Yet, God will preserve and protect His called out ones through His sovereign providence.

All the advances here are by faith and the obstacle is one of fear.

The map below gives an overview of the journeys depicted in Genesis 11-12.
The Situation in Abraham’s Past (11:27-32)

Moses records for us the particulars of Abrams past, his family, his home, his worship. He does so in a transition through Abram’s father, Terah. Thus the section open’s with “these are the generations of Terah.” Again, we have the opening of a Tol*dot, the introduction to the central theme and narrative of Genesis.

As we peruse the text, let us not forget the importance of this narrative. So many important New Testament texts will come back to this call from God and covenant with Abram as central to understanding redemptive history. We will do well to think deeply about this, not in a way that creates two story lines in the Bible, but rather sees Christ as the center of all the Bible’s story. Abram, his descendents, his covenants, his faith, his hopes and his obedient trust all are wrapped up in bringing us to Christ.

His Family Relations (v.27-30)

First, Moses helps us understand Abram’s family situation. He is one among three brothers, the first of whom was born when Terah was 70. Haran, Abram’s brother is the father of Lot. This name Haran is very important in the family. Haran was Terah’s father and the name of the city where he lived. While they lived in Ur, Haran died, leaving Lot as the ward of Abram.

His Settled Residence (v.31-32)

There are a couple of textual issues to deal with here.

In Acts 7:2-4, Stephen, preaching to the Sanhedrin at his trial says, “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’ 4 Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living.” [ESV]. He establishes a timeline that has what is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3 as actually happening here. God calls Abraham. The family heads towards Canaan (v.31). They settle down in Haran, named for Terah’s father, which has become a center of pagan moon worship. We do not know the reasons, other than the possibility that Terah was unable or unwilling to travel on to Canaan.

The second issue arises from the dates and ages given. Without going into all the arguments, it is not possible for Abram to be born when Terah was 70, and for him to be 75 (Genesis 12:4) when he left Haran if Terah died at 205 years old. There are two solutions. Bruce Waltke points out the Samaritan Pentateuch has that Terah is 145, not 205. This would make sense of the numbers. Another proposal is that Genesis 11:26 is saying that Terah was 70
when he began to have children. Those sons, in order of importance were, Abram, Nahor and Haran with Abram actually born when Terah was 130. The difficulty here is to imagine then why Abram and Sarah are concerned with having no children at 100.

Terah, as the patriarch of the clan and the subject of this unit, brings the family out of Ur and heads toward Canaan. We know they did so because God had appeared to Abram. They went to the ancestral home at Haran. We simply do not know the reasons why. We do not even really know how long it was. The only hint that it may have been long is the use of the phrase, “they settled there.”

**His Inherited Religion** *(v.27-30)*

Was Abram a worshipper of God before he was called out? I do not believe so. Abram, like his father, was probably an idol worshipper. We know that Rebecca had access to and kept the household idols when she was brought to be Isaac’s wife. And much later, Joshua, speaking to the people of Israel and challenging them to serve the Lord their God and to choose life, says, “Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. [Joshua 24:2-3, ESV].

So here is the dark pagan past of Israel’s great patriarch. His father is steeped in Babylonish pagan idolatry. One of his brothers dies leaving orphans for him to care for. His wife is infertile, leaving him with no children and no heirs. The call from God has come. There has been a long trip to Haran. His father is dead. And he lives in the center of pagan moon worship.

**The Obedience of Abraham’s Faith** *(12:1-9)*

So the sovereign call of God comes to this heathen Gentile. Here is the authentication of *patrimony* of Abram in the Messianic line.

**God’s Word Calls** *(v.1-3)*

The reading here grammatically can and ought to be, “Now the Lord had said to Abram.” As we mentioned earlier, the record of this call which God gave to Abraham in Ur is recorded, not in the Terah cycle, but rather in the beginning of the Abram cycle.

God’s Word comes first as a command. If Abram is to be a follower of God, then he must be obedient to God. He must do what God says. Attached to this command is a promise from God. God promises what He has purposed or planned for Abram and his descendents. So here is the first draft, if you will, of the Abrahamic Covenant. It came as a call to obey. We have seen this pattern in the Noahic account of the command and then the covenant. This theme then unfolds in the larger redemptive history where we have the Mosaic Law then the New Covenant.
So what we have here is the launching of the purpose of Israel as a people. The
Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic Covenants point to God as revealer, redeemer
and regent. The Abrahamic Covenant is about God revealing Himself. The
Abrahamic Covenant reverses Babel. Here God speaks (v.1) and appears (v.7).
This revelation to them becomes the light to the world. Thus, the Lord Jesus
comes as the fulfiller of the Abrahamic Covenant. Through Him, revelation is
completed. He is the first and final Word.

The Mosaic Covenant is about redemption. It is about how God reverses the
Eden. Redemption is not just the forgiveness of our sins; it is the total reversal of
the sin problem in all the cosmos. The Mosaic Covenant, as revelation about re-
demption purchased, applied and completed is fulfilled in Jesus, our Redeemer.

The Davidic Covenant is about rule. It is about how God reverses Satan. God
is asserting His rule over all by establishing His rule on earth. David then points
us to the Lord Jesus who ascends to the throne to rule over heaven and earth in
the resurrection and ascension.

Each of the covenants then establishes the categories, motifs, images and con-
cepts through which God discloses His saving work. It is easy then to see how
Jesus comes as the fulfiller of all the covenants and as the new Israel. All of this
was designed to point to Him. Better yet, all of these things are the shadows cast
back into the Old Testament by the substance and reality of Jesus Christ.

God’s command is to leave his place of residence, his family or clan relations
and his inheritance (his father’s house). It is a radical call. Even today, people re-
sist even in the fast transportation we have the moving away from family. Yet
God calls him to leave and to go for it will be in the land that God will show him
that the promises will begin to be fulfilled.

God’s command to go out is accompanied by a suite of promises. These “I
wills...” later become the formal Abrahamic Covenant. So that Abraham will be
a blessing, God promises to provide for him by:

- Making him into a great nation;
- Blessing him with wealth, spiritually and physically;
- Making his name and reputation great.

God also promises to protect him by:

- Blessing those who bless him;
- Cursing those who dishonor him;

God promises to make him the source of blessing to all the world.

These promises will be expanded and clarified when the Covenant is formally
given and ratified in a later chapter. Moses’ purpose here in giving the elements
of the covenant in the call from God is to show that Abram’s relationship faith
and obedience are grounded in God’s precepts and promises. We will do more to
relate the Abrahamic Covenant with its fulfillment in Christ in later studies.
**Abraham’s Faith Obeys** *(v.4-6)*

Abram responds to the Word of God in faith, in believing God in an obeying way. He goes as the Lord told him. So, Moses picks the chronology up here in Haran. Abram gathers up those who are his responsibility and steps out in obedience, as Hebrews says, “Not knowing exactly where he was going…” He is an immensely wealthy man with many servants and a nephew in his charge. Given other texts, Lot may also be going because he is a believer and is attaching himself to the blessing from God for Abram and all who will honor him.

Abram obeys in spite of many obstacles. Verse 6 gives a couple of stops on a 500 mile journey. Then the ominous, the Canaanites dwelt there. His age, his great wealth and possessions, the long journey and the great dangers where he is going all stand against such a move. He is going from being a settled city dweller into a nomadic life. He is moving a large tribe of family, servants, livestock and wealth. But he believes God and goes.

**Abraham’s Fellowship Deepens** *(v.7-9)*

At the Oak of Moreh in Shechem, God appears to Abram. The language is emphatic. God appears to him. God’s appearing to people in the Old Testament are called Theophanies. They are the pre-incarnate appearances of the Lord Jesus. Since Abram has journeyed and is in the center of Canaan, then appears to Abram. He had left Ur and Haran to land God would show him. Here it is. This is the land your descendents will live in.

Abram responds to God with worship. At Shechem and then as he moves through the land, he builds altars. He is not building these as territorial markers. He is building these as places of worship and devotion to the God he trusts and obeys. We do not know how long he is in each of these locations, but we know that in building altars to the Lord, he also worships the Lord. He calls on the name of the Lord.

**The Trouble of Abraham’s Failure** *(v.10-20)*

But even those who trust and obey the Lord can make unwise decisions and even sin. Moses intends for us to see the connection between these narratives. Even though Abram fails to trust God in the famine and goes to Egypt, the sovereign protection of God shields Abram and Sarah from a heathen Gentile. Here is the authentication of the purity of Sarah in the Messianic line.

**Abraham’s Fearful Deceit** *(v.10-13)*

In an unexpected twist, there is a famine in the promised land. This is an immediate testing of Abram’s faith. Will he hold fast to God and His promises or will he do something else? In order to escape the devastation of the famine, Abram went down to Egypt. While there is no direct comment or condemnation on this, certainly Moses’ audience would be cringing.

The reputation of Egyptian leaders for lust and for power allowed fear to rise up in Abram’s heart. Sarah was a beautiful and intelligent woman, even at 80 years old. So, in fear that the Egyptians would kill him in order to obtain Sarah, he de-
vised this half-truth and enlisted Sarah in the charade. Now look, there is no way to mitigate Abram’s sin here. Sarah was his half-sister. At one level then, she is not lying. It is what she is not saying that is the deception. Abram draws her into the deceit by appealing for his own safety and her well-being.

**Pharaoh’s Wrongful Marriage** *(v.14-16)*

The Egyptians are quite taken with Sarah because of her beauty. When the Pharaoh is introduced to her through his court, he takes her into his house because he does not know she is married. Most rabbinical and modern commentators agree that while Sarah was brought into Pharaoh’s household, they had no relations. She was a part of his harem, if you will.

**God’s Decisive Intervention** *(v.17-20)*

In another ironic twist, Abram is blessed by the Pharaoh who enriches him even more. But God intervenes to curse Pharaoh because of the threat to Sarah’s purity. Isn’t this a violation of the promise to bless those who honor Abram? No, because God is intervening to protect and to preserve the Messianic line. He will curse Pharaoh with disease to get his attention on that which is wrong. Pharaoh confronts Abram and then sends him out of Egypt.

Moses again connects Abram’s personal history with Israel’s national history. The parallels are obvious. A principle of revelation is being established. There are times when personal histories follow the patterns of redemptive history. The great exhibition and exposition of this principle is seen in Galatians 3:21-4:7. There, the Christ’s coming is at the center of redemptive history and faith coming is at the center of my personal history.

Certainly, Israel coming up out of Egypt has experienced the personal protecting and providing hand of God. The family had gone down to Egypt during a famine. They were enslaved there until God delivered them. God’s promises will hold true. He protected Abram and Sarah in Egypt. He delivered Israel from Egypt. He will guide and guard them all along the way.

As we come to think personally and practically about this section of God’s Word, let me remind you of something. We have a difficult tension to resolve. We don’t’ want application to be a moralizing of the text so that we derive from this narrative moral lessons not intended by the author. Yet, we are also told in Romans 15:4 that these things were written for our instruction so that we might have endurance and hope. 1 Corinthians 10:6 also tells us that the Old Testament was written to illustrate how we are all vulnerable to sin so that we will not desire evil as they did. So we will walk the third way, the way of hearing the instruction in the text teach us and observing the illustrations in the text to warn us.
God’s sovereign call comes to those whom He has chosen to love and to favor. God is not responding to some faith initiative of Abram. God has chosen Abram to call him to faith.

The darkness of one’s sin is no barrier to bright light of God’s saving revelation. It is a very great joy to know that God’s saving call and the response of faith can come even in the greatest of sinners. God, who made the light to shine at creation, makes the light of salvation shine into the darkest hearts.

Having faith in God, following God, discipleship all demand that we be willing to leave all and do as God commands. True faith in God acts. It is not the acting that saves. But all saving faith acts. Following God will almost certainly mean leaving behind something. It will certainly mean leaving behind your sins. It may mean leaving behind your wealth or fame or family. If you are not willing to leave these things, then you are not bowing to the God you claim to believe in. Those who believe and bow are those who are saved.

We obey God by faith. Obedience to God is an act of faith. We hear His Word, whether in precepts, principles or promises, and we act on them. We trust in who God is and in what He says in such a way that we are moved to obey Him. Obedience in the flesh does not please God. The only way to please God, even in obedience, is by faith.

God will test our faith through the situations of our lives. Like the famine that came to Abram, the temptations in the wilderness to Jesus, the troubles to Paul in ministry, things will come that will test our faith. They may be huge hardships or just the monotony of life, over and over again. In the midst of these things, trust in God. Do not go back. Do not turn away. Do not devise your own ways out of these situations. Please God through them until He is pleased to deliver you from them.

Consider the greatness of the Lord Jesus who is our revelation, our redemption and our ruler. He is the substance of all these shadows, the fulfiller of all these covenants, the object of all these hopes. Worship Him.
The Generous Worshipper
Genesis 13

Introduction

Two Latin phrases set the tone for our text today. *Carpe diem* means, “seize the day”. It calls for us to grow into our purpose and grab what is immediate. It is the heart throb of our lives. But it leaves us often empty and sometimes ruined. But then there is *carpe Deum*. Embrace God. This is the call of the Bible. It is a call that radically changes our lives. It is a call that sometimes brings earthly suffering. But it is always a call that yields eternal satisfaction.

Two characters in the narrative before reflect these very different phrases. Lot is a man who lived *carpe diem*. He seizes the day. Abram was a man who lived *carpe Deum*. He embraces God.

This is the beginning of the Abram-Lot cycle. As it follows the stories of Abram and Lot, Moses is showing the difference between living by faith and living by sight. He has launched this with chapter 12. There, Abram begins by faith and fails by fear. He follows the Lord as he believes the Lord. He fails the Lord as he doubts the Lord. Abraham’s faith and Lot’s folly are woven through the narrative. As we consider this, we will want to pay attention to the blessing and curse motif that is here. Abram’s ever growing obedience of faith is contrasted to Lot’s growing disobedience in the flesh.

One other point I think is important as we enter this section. We will highlight it later. Lot is called in the New Testament a righteous man (2 Peter 2:7). His soul was vexed by the sin around him and trouble he had gotten himself into. So we must take heed to the warning here: even the righteous can walk by sight and get into all kinds of trouble.

Riches and its Conflict

Abram and Lot here are both men of great wealth. They are men of faith. Their life situations are similar and shared. Yet, all will not be well. Moses again is highlighting the advances and obstacles in the movement of redemptive history. He is not saying that God is being thwarted, but rather that God’s plans are actually being advanced. So, there will be many advances and obstacles in the life of God’s people. But God is never frustrated in His purposes. He is using both to advance His agenda, what He has determined to do.

The Advances by Faith

In a brief sentence, Moses records a long journey. They return from Egypt. Abram and all his clan, his tribe, are doing what Israel in the receipt of this letter are doing. They are making their way up from Egypt. For Abram, this is a return to the place of promise. This is also a return to the place where his faith faltered, where doubt in his heart directed his steps to Egypt and fear framed deceit. Yet, during this time Abram has become even richer than he was. Israel, like him, had been given enormous wealth while in Egypt.
In their journey, they arrive where they began, where they first built an altar. Here is an advance as well. The man of faith has returned to the place of sacrifice and worship. If Abram is going to be blessed by God after being corrected by God, he has to come to the place of sacrifice, where sin is taken care of. It brings him once begin between Bethel and Ai, between the house of God and a place of ruin.

There, they call on the Name of the Lord. Now the man of faith worships. Being at the place of sacrifice, being near an altar is only a geographical reality. Calling on the Name of the Lord is the spiritual act. Humbling himself and recognizing His great God, he worships God. As a man of faith, the great issue is going to be settled: will he have a worship driven life? Will the recognition of his own need of God as signified by the altar and the affirmation of the greatness and worth of God drive his life?

This is the great question for all people. We are made to worship. Worship is the core of our heart functions. Worship is who and what we believe and who and what do we desire for and delight in. Romans 1 tells us that sinners’ hearts are afflicted with disorders of worth and worship. They exchange truth for a lie, the transcendent God for creature, and holy living for depraved wickedness. God then hands them over to the lies and lusts they have embraced. But it is still all about worship.

For us as Christians, we are aware that we are worship driven. Therefore, we aim to be conscious about what organizes and orients our hearts. We mist examine our beliefs and wants. We will be clear in our own souls that we will believe and bow to God in every movement of our souls and lives. We will aim in a worship driven life to exalt God, to live for His glory, to magnify His supreme worth in ourselves and for all peoples.

But a worship driven life is not free of trouble. Great advances in faith obedience and calling on the Name of the Lord, great growth and transformation in a Godward life may be accompanied by the most severe and surprising difficulties.

The Obstacle of Conflict (v.5-7)

The obstacle for Abram and Lot is their great wealth. They are living together as nomadic tribesmen, moving with vast herds of life stock and large numbers of people. In a surprising irony, the land is not able to bear the combined livestock. While they are in the land of Canaan, they are having to share its resources. Lot has seemingly become an obstacle to Abram’s full and sole occupancy of the promised land.

Conflict arises between their servants, presumably over grazing and water rights. The word here represents more than just verbal disagreement. There is an escalating conflict that threatens to erupt in open war. Each of the herdsman is defending the prosperity of his respective master. The wellbeing of the live stock is at stake. Since they are together and both are unwilling to conceded to the other, conflict arises.

Again, Moses give us that ominous sentence we have heard several times. The Canaanites and Perizzites were dwelling in the land. They are not the only ones
living in the region. It is inhabited by a number of tribes and peoples. So Abram’s title to the land and the resources of the land are being challenged by these two major groups of people.

So what will a worship driven man of faith do? How will he respond when he is titular head of his clan, the rightful recipient of the promise and the land, and the one through whom all attached to him will be blessed? Will he assert his rights? Will he exercise his authority?

Resolution and its Choices  
(v.8-13)

We can well see the great obstacle and danger here. This conflict can destroy them. Range wars for grazing and water are well-known, not just in American western history, but across centuries and cultures. These wars have been vicious and destructive. The danger to Abram and Lot’s families is very real. Further, they have the reputation of the Lord to uphold as worshippers of Yahweh.

As a man of faith, Abram takes the initiative to propose a resolution. Here are the heart and actions of a man of faith and a worship driven life. Moses will show us the difference between the man who walks by faith and the man who walks by sight.

The Generous Offer  
(v.8-9)

Abram shows us that those who walk by faith can be great hearted, generous. In a heart that accepts God’s promises as completely true and with a heart whose wants and desires are submitted totally to God, the child of God will respond to conflict, to being sinned against, with great graciousness and generosity. Rather than being poised to enter into conflict, his humility before God poises him to move quickly to resolve conflict.

Abram is willing to not defend his rights. All the land that God has promised is stretched out before them including the Jordon River Valley to their east. He does not assert the right he actually has; that is, he does not tell Lot to move somewhere else. His heart looks to others interest first and his hand sweeps across all the rich and desirable land.

Further, Abram has learned to trust the Lord for the consequences of other’s decisions. This is a very hard thing for many. But Abram so believes God that he is willing to let Lot make the choice. He appears to be confident that God will work out everything for Abram’s good through the keeping of His promises.

So, Abram’s worship of God has humbled him and made him generous. He no longer fears the famine or fears the Pharaoh. He has learned much about what trusting God and desiring God means. He will walk by faith, not by sight.

The Greedy Choice  
(v.10-11)

Lot shows us that those who walk by sight can be easily deceived, greedy. In a heart that is seeking its own first and measures what is best by what is seen, Lot makes a choice that begins a long, slow and terrible slide into the slough of sin. This will end in his daughters getting him drunk, committing incest with him and his begetting the Amorites and the Moabites, the great enemies of Israel.
In contrast to Abram, Lot is looking out primarily for his own interests. He chooses serving his wants. Rather than looking to the gracious offer of his uncle and seeing such great faith, he turns with heart delight to choose what he wants. This is the effect of walking by sight. Our heart’s beliefs and wants will focus the gaze of our eyes on the things that are seen. We will then choose them and often suffer because of them.

Sadly, Lot does not see the dangers because he is governed by sight, not by faith. All he can see it the beauty, the pleasure, the profit, the good. Moses reminds the readers that what is the Dead Sea Valley was once a great lush and fertile valley. This is what entices Lot. He cannot sense the depravity. He cannot smell in his soul the corruption. He is oblivious to the slippery slope. While still a righteous man, he is a believer who walks, lives by sight. In the Scriptures, faith is an eye, not a hand. It sees, not necessarily grasps. Real living faith sees the invisible and thus is not shaken in the impossible. Thus, faith is consistently contrasted to sight, not reason. Faith is as reasonable as believing the Word of God. But walking by sight exposes us to all sorts of spiritual danger and difficulty.

So, Lot’s worship of God is deficient and has allowed him to become worldly. Unlike his uncle, he is not spoken of here as calling on the Lord and building an altar. He casts his eyes, not in trust and submission to God, but on what he can get for the moment. A worship driven life is not like this. By faith, the worship driven life receives God’s promises, embraces God’s purposes and submits to God’s precepts.

The Grave Results (v.12-13)

Abram settles in the land of Canaan. This exposes Abram to two dangers: the danger to his livestock and the danger from the other tribes living there. But he is living in and making claim to the land God promised. So while there may be grave dangers, there is also the beginning of receiving the fulfillment. Yet, all Israel hearing this read to them, knows that will be a very long time, almost 500 years, before the fulfillment will be complete. But even then, not yet. Not until the Lord Jesus Christ rises from the dead and ascends into heaven is the final Promised Land entered victoriously.

Lot settles in valley among the cities, finally moving closer to Sodom. This exposes him to great sinners living there and their debased carnality. While Abram sojourns in the land of promise, not yet receiving the city he is seeking whose builder and maker is God, Lot is moving towards the city where sin abounds.

Moses is powerfully presenting two lessons for the nation of Israel. These lessons are part of the justification for the conquest.

Lot left the land of Canaan, he was not expelled from it. Moab and Ammon have no legitimate claim to the land. It was right for Israel to come in and remove them. They were illegitimately living in the land promised to another.

Abram occupies the land of Canaan because of God’s promise. Israel was not an invader, claiming what was not theirs. The promise made to Abram was going to be fulfilled initially to them. They had a God-given right to that land.
Reaffirmation and its Covenant (v.14-18)
Now that the obstacle has been removed, now that Lot has moved away from Canaan and Abram moved in, God speaks to Abram and reaffirms the promise.

God is Faithful to His Word (v.14-17)
God instructs Abram to lift up his eyes and look at what God has promised. In contrast to Lot who lifted up his eyes and looked at what he wanted, Abram is lift up his eyes and look at all that God has promised. God will be faithful to His Word in giving Abram all this land, all that he can see. And frankly, as we now know because of the New Testament, O so much more as well.

God reminds Abram to believe promises which have not yet any physical reality. Do you see this? Abram is to believe God for the land that he can see now. But he also to believe God for the son, the descendents he cannot yet see. If one part of the promise is true, so is the rest. If this is the land, then the son is coming. Not only will there be a son, but there will an innumerable company of children. Abram is thinking primarily physical descendents. But God will bring in even more than he can imagine for all the descendents of Abraham are those who are spiritual sons by faith.

God commands Abram to faithfully obey in doing his part in walking the land. Abram’s faith, his worship driven life, is not one of retirement, retreat or passive waiting. It is an active life. It is a faith that believes God in an obeying way. “Go and walk because I will give,” God says. This is so true for us. Most of what God promises to our faith and provides through His grace causes us to be willing to do what He commands.

Abram is Faithful to His God (v.18)
Abram responds by obedience. Too many have tried to turn believing God into sitting and waiting on God. Believing God means walking with God, being active in our obedience to God. A worship driven life will be intensely practical. It will be filled with obedience. It will go where God has given. Abram sojourns to Hebron.

Abram responds with worship. He builds an altar. This last sentence is the marker over Abram’s life in this chapter. You want to be a person of faith, have a worship driven life? You must be committed to the altar, to the cross of Jesus Christ. You will see your need of a sacrificial substitute for sinners. You will rest your trust on the lamb. You will believe what God says. You will bow your hearts desires and wants to our Redeemer and Ruler. You will both receive what you can see by faith, and be willing to believe and wait for what you cannot.
Let me wrap this up by screwing some truths deep into your hearts.

In a worship driven life, we will have the attitude of Abram and the mind of Christ:

- We will be poised to resolve conflict when it is in our power to do so.
- We will seek the best and interest of others.
- We will not assert our rights, but rather hold them loosely before God.
- We will so believe God to carry out His promises as our Sovereign God that we will entrust to Him the decisions of others.
- We will commit ourselves to the justice and glory of God even when others walk by sight and possibly even sin against us.

Two ways are set before you, to walk by faith or to walk by sight. Will you believe the promises of God or the promises of the world?

- Will you trust in God alone for your salvation? The world and its religions offer all sorts of enticing and entertaining alternatives. But they are not offering the gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of the Son of God come as a man, the Lord Jesus. Therefore, they are not offering you salvation.

- Will you trust in God alone for your transformation, for your growth in grace? Will you grow in practical holiness God’s way? The world and its systems of legalism and psychology with its reliance on the flesh and on human wisdom tells you how to live. But it is not God’s way. It is the way of sight. It is the way of the world. It will lead you to ruin.

- Will you trust in God alone for your satisfaction? Here is another way to ask what you worship. Whose approval do you crave? What promises of pleasure, power, provision and purpose dazzle the eyes of your heart? What baubles of worldly stuff displace a longing for heaven and God? What candy or popcorn fills you up and ruins your hunger for God and taste for His delights? Will you in fact walk by sight over your spouse, your children, your singleness, your cars, your stereos? Or will you believe God in an obeying way?

Here in this story is the greatness of the humbleness of Christ. Just as Abram looked more after the interest of Lot, did not assert his own rights and was willing to simply obey God, the Lord Jesus came. He came for our interest yet served to obey His Father and to glorify Him. He gave up His right to be acknowledged as God. He shed heaven’s glory and put on earth’s dust. He refused to strike back at those who sinned against Him. He went voluntarily to die. And he did not die just any death, but the vile death of a criminal’s execution. Therefore, God has exalted Him. At His Name every knee will bow. Every tongue will one day confess He is Lord to the glory of God. To long for that in a way that loves and lives for the glory of God is truly, the worship driven life.
The Humble Warrior
Genesis 14

Introduction

What organizes and orients our hearts is often clearly seen in what we fight for and boast in. We will often fight for relationships and boast in our riches – riches of gifts, abilities, material things, station in life, positions and possessions. Out of our mouth come boasting words launched by what we prize and who we take pleasure in. So we will boast in ourselves. We will boast in our children. We will boast about our achievements. But this is not the way of the humble warrior. What organizes and orients Abram’s heart causes him to locate his boasting in something or someone completely different.

How do we get here to this text? Where are we in the larger story, particularly in the Lot cycle? The larger chiasm of which this a part looks like this.

A Introduction: The promise of descendants - The tension begins (12:1-9)
  B Abram lies about Sarai in Egypt (12:10-20)
    C Lot settles in Sodom (13: 1-18)
    D Abram intervenes for Lot and Sodom (14:1-24)
      E Promise: a son from Abram himself (15:1-21)
        F Ishmael’s birth (16:1-16)
          G God’s Covenant: Abram’s and Sarai’s names changed; circumcision instituted; promise of a son reiterated (17:1-21)
            f Ishmael circumcised (17:22-27)
              e Promise: a son from Sarah herself (18:1-15)
                d Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot (18:16-33)
                  c Lot flees Sodom (19:1-38)
                    b Abraham lies about Sarah in Gerar (20:1-18)
                      a Conclusion: The birth of Isaac - The tension resolved (21:1-7)

Obstacles and advances, tension and resolution mark the movement through this narrative. Moses shows them now that God’s people may face danger and difficulty through obvious and through the subtle. The enemy may test them through open warfare, capture and battle. The enemy may tempt them with flattery and approval. He will provide the scratch of self-recognition where we itch with self-regard.

Here then is what it means to be a humble warrior.
The Great Battles (v.1-16)
The narrative here changes tone into a precise historical record. Moses moves the narrative by showing the great strength of Abram as a warrior.

The Conquest by the Eastern Kings (v.1-7)
The region east of the Salt Sea which included Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim and Zoar had been subjugated by the Eastern Alliance of Amraphel of Shinar (Babylon), Arioch of Ellasar, Tidal of Goiim led by Chedorlaomer of Elam. This alliance had moved through and conquered most of the trans-Jordan down to Kadesh-Barnea. For 12 years, they kept the Southern Alliance in thrall as absentee suzerain rulers. Dr. Nelson Glueck, a Palestinian archeologist, has completed digs in this area from this time period uncovering ancient cities and towns bearing the marks of foreign occupation. [Morris, The Genesis Record, p.312-313]

In the thirteenth year, the city states rebelled against their overlords. We do not know exactly what that rebellion entailed. Certainly, the tribute or money tax due their overlords was withheld. It would be reasonable to assume that the occupying presence of the eastern kings, in whatever form that took, was attacked. Moses records for us the fact of the rebellion without going into all the details.

The response of the Eastern Alliance is to move into the region, moving from city to city like locusts, destroying everything in their path. They seemed to have avoided following the normal trade routes and so moved across the open country. Glueck’s archeological digs also demonstrate that at some point, this civilization was almost totally wiped out by an invading army. The houses, villages and towns are totally leveled. The Eastern Alliance appears to have not only put down the rebellion but also to make an example of them.

The Capture of Lot in Sodom (v.8-12)
The Southern Alliance seems to have decided to go on the offensive against the Eastern Alliance in open battle, rather than sitting waiting on them to attack their cities. They meet and engage one another in the Valley of Siddim. This valley was full of bitumen pits. This valley had been heavily mined for the minerals that were used in pottery, mortar, hardening of surfaces and waterproofing.

The Eastern Alliance routs the kings allied with Sodom. As the Southern Alliance flees from the battlefield, many of their soldiers fall into these open mines and are killed. With the defending army defeated in the field, the Eastern Alliance takes the two major cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. They carry away much of their possessions and their people.

Moses then records that Lot no longer merely sojourned in the region, but had now settled into Sodom itself. Later, we will see that he even had his own house in the city. He also, along with all his goods and his family, were taken captive. Evidently, the conquering kings intended to take not only the material wealth home with them, but also a large host of the inhabitants.
The Chase by Abram (v.13-16)

During this great destruction and havoc, many were able to escape. One who did escape, went to Abram to report that his nephew had been taken captive. Abram was dwelling by the Oaks of Mamre and had established an alliance with the Amorites Mamre, Eshcol and Aner.

Abram gathered up his trained men as well as some from his allies. We know from verse 24 that Mamre, Eshcol and Aner at sent a contingent or went themselves as a part of the small army. Moses says that there were 318 armed men. Like Gideon later, this may seen like a very small army. But its very size means that a victory be God’s work through the leadership of Abram.

They pursue the Eastern Alliance all the way up to Dan, catching up with them just at nightfall there. Abram divides his forces up and under cover of nightfall and attacks their camp from several directions. The Eastern Alliance is shattered and flees northward with Abram’s army in hot pursuit all the way to a town north of Damascus. In fleeing for their lives, they leave their captives and their booty behind.

Thus, Lot, his family, their possessions and presumably, many other residents of Sodom and Gomorrah are released and returned to their homes. There is some evidence that in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities were sacked, but not razed so that the refugees can return not have to entirely rebuild. Lot returns to Sodom, resettling there. You have to wonder why he does not at this point leave Sodom and try to either reestablish with Abram or seek a different place to live.

Abram is shown here to be a great tribal chief and mighty warrior. His tribe is beginning to emerge as a local force to be reckoned with. His power and prestige, the respect he would be shown, has now been established. In this context, Abram is identified for the first time as “the Hebrew” (v.13). His tribe is now gaining recognition so that it has a name.

Abram’s care for Lot is also shown. Abram intervenes for Lot here in chapter 14, receives the final Covenant and its ratification in chapters 15-17 and then intercedes for Lot in chapter 18. With Lot’s bad choices and difficult consequences as the backdrop, Abram’s faith and walk with God is highlighted. As a worship driven man of faith, he has been generous to Lot and utterly trusting in God. Now, we will see him as a humble leader who glorifies God in the midst of victory.
The Glorious Blessing (v.17-24)

How does Abram glorify God? Here, after the battle comes the blessing.

This amazing text speaks through its structure and its use in Scripture. A short chiastic shapes it and Hebrews interprets it. Moses is contrasting the Kings of Salem and Sodom. The King of Salem comes with a blessing and the King of Sodom comes with a demand; one comes to give and the other to take.

The Receipt of the Blessing (v.17-20)

Abram is met, after his great victory, by these two kings. The King of Sodom comes out to meet him in the King’s Valley. There also, Abram is met by Melchizedek, the King of Salem. This mysterious and august personage simply appears here in Genesis without a real introduction. Yet, clearly, Melchizedek is at the center of this glorious blessing.

Five important statements are made about Melchizedek.

**His Identity**
His name in Hebrew means King of Righteousness. His name not only identifies who he is, but to what he was known for. The names of people, given in the Bible, tend to point to their character.

**His Authority**
He rules over the city which is called Salem (shalom), or Peace. Most agree that this probably is a reference to what will later become the city of Jerusalem. It would not have real significance to the Israelites to whom Moses was initially writing. But later generations could not but help see the reference.

**His Hospitality**
He brings out bread and wine. In the culture of the day, these were the symbols of gracious hospitality. Through bringing these fellowship foods, Melchizedek is honoring Abram. He is humbly treating him as a respected person.

**His Office**
He is the priest of the God Most High. While this is a parenthetical in our English Bibles, it is a significant statement in the redemptive history. Here is one who is both King and Priest. He is the priest of God *before the Law is given* and *not in the line of Aaron and Levi*. As priest he represents the Most High God. He then stands to mediate between Abram and God.

**His Blessing**
Melchizedek makes this declaration of blessing.

Abram is blessed by the God who is Creator/Owner of all, of heaven and earth. This shows that God has sovereignly bestowed and bequeathed to Abram the land and descendents through the promises, the covenants. God, as creator and possessor of all has the right to give as He sees fit.
This blessing then declares to all that Abram’s claim by faith is God’s to give and Abram’s to receive.

God is blessed by granting Abram the victory. God declares the Abram’s victory is God’s deliverance. God then is blessed, God is praised, when Abram acknowledges God in his own doing.

Israel again learns that God will give them the land He has promised and the victory required to actually obtain it. God blesses in giving and is blessed in making the receipt of the blessing possible. Thus God is at the center of it all. Abram cannot boast in being blessed by God – it is sheer mercy. Nor can Abram boast in his victory – it is God’s doing. Thus God’s people, like Abram, are blessed by God and boast in God. The giver is glorified. The recipient is blessed and is blessing as he boasts in the Giver.

The Response to the Blessing (v. 20b-24)

Abram’s understanding of the blessing shapes his response to the King of Salem and the King of Sodom.

In What He Gives (v. 20b)

Abram gave a tenth of the spoil to Melchizedek. Here is the first mention in the Bible of giving a tenth. Make no mistake; this is important to our understanding of giving. Abram is responding to the greatness of God, the blessing he has received and the bounty that God has given by giving in return. While the idea of a Kingly tithe was common in their culture, Hebrews says that this tenth is given to Melchizedek as the priest of the Most High God (Hebrews 7:4-10). It is before the Law. It is a response to God’s power, providence and provision. It is gratitude responding to grace.

We teach that God’s people are always, in view of God as the creator and owner of all, in view of our being dependent recipients of all His graces are to respond by faith with gratitude in generous giving. We do not give as a matter of the Law. We give in the context of grace. Like Abram, before the Law was codified at Sinai, we experience the blessing of God and boast in Him through giving as an act of worship.

Christian giving is an imperative, a responsibility. We don’t get that from this text, though it certainly informs and helps shape our giving. The New Testament clearly tells us that each of us must give in a proportional, planned and periodic manner in line with what we have. The debate over tithe is simply the tool of the enemy to distract us and to divide us. Beloved, our God is the creator and possessor of all things. All that we have is a blessing from Him. Our hearts are to be humbly poised, not to grasp at everything we can, but to give as generously as we can.

In What He Refuses (v. 21-24)

Abram refused to be enriched by the King of Sodom. Please do not miss the impact of this. More is said about Abram’s thinking about what he refused than about what he gave. Why is this? Because the very beliefs and wants that caused him to refuse to be enriched by the King of Sodom are the rea-
sons he gives to the King of Salem. That is, Abram believes the fame and reputation of God are at stake.

First, there is THE SOLEMN PROMISE that Abram has made (v.22-23). The solemnity of this oath is highlighted. The seriousness of what is at stake frames Abram’s thinking. He is neither the creator nor the possessor nor the distributor of all this bounteous blessing. The Lord, the God Most High, the Creator/Possessor of heaven and earth is His King, His Lord and Benefactor. He has heard the blessing Melchizedek gave and sees by faith the core truth of the high and holy place that God holds. Here is growth and change in Abram. The Pharaoh in Genesis 12 was the visible and therefore, acknowledged benefactor of Abram. But now, Abram has come to understand that God alone, even in the midst of a military campaign, is the bestower of bounty and blessing.

There is THE GRAND PURPOSE to be upheld (v.23). Abram is concerned for the fame and reputation of God. God will be Abram’s benefactor. He will not allow the King of Sodom to boast where God is to be boasted in. He is concerned for the glory of God. He desires that the great worth of God is magnified before the eyes of men. He, the blessed by God, will bless God in his giving and in his glorying. If we are to have purpose driven lives, let this purpose, this great aim, shape all we do – may we boast in God alone.

There is THE PRACTICAL WISDOM to be considered (v.24). He, as the man of God, is free to refuse what the King of Sodom offers. But he knows that he cannot speak for his allies who have gone to war at their own expense. Abram, as a worship driven man, generous in his dealings with Lot (Ch. 13), is generous in his dealings with others as well. He refuses his share. It is right for him. But these three Amorites should be allotted their share, their reward. What he denies for himself, he insists for others as their due.

**The Role of the Blesser**

**Hebrews 7**

So what are we to make of this text? Does the New Testament interpret and apply this text to Christ? Yes. The author of Hebrews makes much of Melchizedek in relation to the Lord Jesus. He does so based on Psalm 110:4. There the Messiah, the Ruler from Zion, is promised by an unchangeable oath that He will be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. As the author follows the trajectory of a Canonical Theology, he does what the Scriptures always demand that we do: what we formulate in doctrine always is developed directly from the time and space facts of the Biblical record. The New Testament is an interpretation – it is taking the Old Testament record, getting it right in its setting, establishing connections through other texts pointing to Christ and then interpreting them in a New Covenant framework.

Hebrews then unpacks the significance of Melchizedek. He is like Christ as King and Priest. In him righteousness and peace are brought together. On the record, he has no genealogy, no birth or death. He receives tithes and imparts blessings. And his priesthood is both before and apart from the Law and from Levi. And his priesthood is the order in which Jesus Christ exercises His own priesthood. From
Psalm 110, Hebrews begins to develop the interpretation of the Genesis account through a Christ-centered, New Covenant lens.

Thus, Hebrews says that an amazing change has taken place during the 33 ½ years of Jesus’ life. (See Hebrews, R.Kennedy)

The first change is the family of the priesthood (v.13-14). Jesus, God’s final High Priest, was in the tribe of Judah, not Levi and ordained in the line of Melchizedek. The next change is in the foundation for the Priesthood (v.15-19). Jesus comes as a priest, not on the basis of the Law, but on “the power of an indestructible life.” The third change is the filling of the office (v.20-22). Jesus becomes a priest, not through heredity, but rather through the promise of God. The indestructible life of Jesus Christ and the inviolable oath of Almighty God guarantee the New Covenant. All that God is for us in Christ as expressed in the New Covenant will, without fail, come to fulfillment. The last change is the finality of the office (v.23-24). The Old Testament priests could not sustain their efforts forever. Weariness, sickness, senility and finally and inevitably, death ended every single ministry. But this is not so with Jesus. He continues because He never dies. He lives forever. We can never come to the mercy seat and find there a new face. It is and will always be Jesus whose sacrifice and intercession greets us with mercy and grace.

Here then is why we have no priests here. Jesus’ priesthood is sufficient and final because it is Melchizedek not Aaron, life not law, by oath not office, and it is permanent, not passing.

O, we must not miss the first verse of chapter 15 just because it is a new chapter. Listen to this, “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’” (Genesis 15:1, ESV). He who has given up much, will now receive more than he can imagine. He will have God as his shield. He will have a very great reward. Beloved, why is it so hard for us to be blessed by God and then be so unwilling to bless God? Is it because of a disorder of worth and worship? Are we simply not satisfied that God Himself is our portion and our reward? But let us join with Abram to lift our hand to the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth, and swear to uphold His great and glorious Name, His fame and reputation, through every simple act worship, that is, of obedience by faith.
We see in Abram’s life here several great lessons for us.

**God’s People Are Poised to Rescue the Wayward.** Even those caught in the consequences of sinful choices. Lot is like the one stray sheep, the one lost coin, the one prodigal son. Unlike the nasty elder brother, we should be quick to pursue those who are straying and rejoice in the repentant. It may be hard work. It may be dangerous work. But it is good and holy work. May we as a gathered church care for, go after and welcome home the wayward.

**God’s People Show Gratitude by Giving.** We have been much blessed by God. We have been rescued from sin and hell. We have been transformed by saving and sanctifying grace. We have life and breath and the basic sustenance of life. We have sufficient suffering to keep us humble and holy. We have a church family who shares and serves and sustains us in faith. How can we not bless God by grace-enabled, glad-hearted, ungrudging, grateful, generous giving?

**God’s People Are Insightful over the Acclaim of the World.** We will not be impressed that the cultural kings of Sodom want to recognize us or to richen us. We need to recognize the danger in that acclaim. We will refuse to seek it and be humbly able to reject it when it comes. We affirm that the praise of men, like the fear of man, is a terrible snare in the heart.

**God’s People Boast in God Alone.** We will live for the glory of God, for the savoring and spreading and sharing of the glory of God. He may do much for us. He may do much through us. But in the bounty of His blessing, we will boast in Him alone. He will receive the praise. We will let our light shine in such a way that men will see our good works and give all the glory to God.

Let us gaze in wonder and worship on the Lord Jesus Christ:

He is our Righteousness, whose name and character are soaked with holiness.

He is our King of Peace, the ruler of Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem.

He is our High Priest, perfect in the order Melchizedek, by the oath of God, in His indestructible life and for the sake of His redeemed people.

He is our Bringer of the bread and wine. No New Covenant Christian can hear that simple phrase without seeing the cross and communion. The hospitality of God is embodied in our taking of the bread and the cup.

He is our Benefactor who in blessing us with bounty enables us to bless Him by boasting in Him alone.

May it then be true of us, that God is all we need and all we want.
The Righteous Believer

Introduction

There is often a very great difference between trusting in God and trusting God. Many people who claim to trust in God struggle with trusting God. Let me see if I can illustrate what I mean:

We can trust in God to save us from our sins. Yet, we often struggle with the hardships and sufferings God to actually deliver us and purify us from our sins. We trust in Him to save us, but don’t trust that He really knows what He is doing.

We can trust in God to provide all our needs. We don’t trust God to know what our needs are. So, we divert what we ought to be giving to support a lifestyle God is not providing for.

The reality is that true faith is both trusting in God and trusting God. You rest in Him and you accept what He brings, regardless. This is what this chapter is all about. Will Abram both trust in God for the offspring and will he trust God for the timing?

Now, the structure of this text is a different kind of chiasm. It follows the form of Hebrew parallelism. If you look at your notes, I have tried to represent the Hebrew structure in them as follows:

A The Covenant Grounded in God
   B The Concern arising from Faith
      C The Confirmation through a Symbol

a The Covenant Grounded in God
   b The Concern arising from Faith
      c The Confirmation through a Symbol

Here is one of those strange narratives in the Bible that seem so distant from us. What possible connection can all this strangeness have to do with our world, our concerns today? This is one of the challenges in studying and in preaching the Bible. Yet, even in this strangeness there is an important nearness for us. Here is the God who promises and the believer who is counted righteous through believing.
The Reward for the Faithful (v.1-5)
“After these things” reminds us that what follows is connected to what went before. Abram has shown his humility in what he gave and in what he refused. So now, he may be a greater man for it, but he is also a poorer man.

A The Covenant Grounded in God (v.1)
The Lord comes to him in a vision to affirm the promise. Here God appears to Abram in a vision. This is again, the first time this word is used in this way. God discloses Himself to Abram through a vision. In Redemptive History, this chapter launches the long thread of visionary and prophetic motifs. In this first unit, the Divine initiative comes in a vision.

The promise is grounded in the identity of God. God says, “You may have given much; you may have refused great wealth; but I am your shield. Do not be afraid.” Faith in the God of the promises deals with the issue of fear. God is our shield; do not fear for the reward is very great.

B The Concern arising from Faith (v.2-3)
But notice Abram’s concern. If he has no family to pass on to this reward, this promise, then what does it really matter? What does a reward mean to man with a great promise but no children? He continues to be childless. You already begin to hear some of the frustration. This is not doubt. This is faith trying figure out what is going on. It is because he does believe God that this is an issue. After all, if God’s promises are not to be trusted, why even be concerned about the inheritance? The heir is going to a servant and a foreigner. While he may be a good and godly man, he is not a son.

This struck me this week as I was working hard to prepare for and praying much over the Elder’s meeting this week. And I am speaking personally here, not for the Elder’s as a whole. How do I believe God with strong and secure faith in His absolute ability and poise to provide for expansion and still ask honest, penetrating, hard questions that sometimes feel like doubt? I do it like Abram does here. I believe God can and will provide. But, I need to ask Him with humility for the wisdom to lead and choose well.

This is what we see here. The way Abram addresses God with “O, Lord God” is using terms that express his humility, his dependence on God. God is his Lord, His King, His sovereign. He is a servant. But he is a servant with a promise and a problem.

C The Confirmation through a Symbol (v.4-5)
O, the gracious goodness of God. He looks down at this servant with a promise and a problem tells him to look up. In the symbol, the sign, the star dotted fields of heaven, God encourages this faithful, humble, generous warrior to have hope.

Can Abram count the stars? No. He cannot count the ones he can see. Half the visible stars from earth are hidden on the other side of the globe. The magnificent splendor of skillions of stars now visible to us through
the Hubble telescope is way beyond his ken. But, the stars cannot be counted. Abram’s offspring also cannot be numbered. And even more than he could have imagined, for all those who believe are sons of Abraham, the believer.

**The Righteousness by Faith** *(v.6)*

What a great sentence we have here! He believes God and God assigns righteousness to him. This is at the center and is the key point. If we were writing this, this would be the punch line. This would be the point. It is here in the middle because all that transpires here is an expression of Abram’s faith in God and God confirming His promise and thus, the assurance of a right standing before God.

So I want to take this sentence and explore it for a moment. This is one of those places where I must at least traverse some of the Bible so that we will get this right.

**In its Old Covenant Context**

First, this not when Abraham was saved. The language here does not support a “at this moment Abram savingly believes.” The “and” in the Hebrew is not “and then” but rather, “now”. Abram engages God with questions, not in order to believe in God, but because he does believe in God. His trust in God has brought him into right standing before God. God credits him, puts on his account, righteousness through faith, through believing. Faith itself is not the righteousness. Nor is exercise of faith an act meriting righteousness. Being counted right before God comes through our believing in God.

Saving belief has been exercised all along. Moses now gives testimony that Abram is not accepted or has right standing or is righteous because he has obeyed. He is counted righteous because he has believed. We know that he has the righteousness obtaining kind of faith because he obeys, submits, humbly expresses his concerns to God. Thus the righteousness counted to him is lived out and expressed through the faith that obeys.

So, Moses is showing that the signs and seals of the covenant are given, not to cause faith, but to sustain the faith already exercised. God then is so good and gracious to strengthen our faith this way. While Abram (and Israel’s) faith is strengthened through these visible symbols, we are pointed to the cross as the faith sustaining symbol.

**In its New Testament Uses**

This text is directly quoted three times in the New Testament. Let’s consider them for a moment. I want to go to them, not to preach those texts to you, but to preach this text as understood by them to you.

**Justified by Faith**  
*Romans 4:9-24*  

In Romans, Abram’s righteousness by faith is the model for ours. He is our spiritual model. Paul argues that Moses is showing us in Genesis 15 that:

*ABRAHAM IS NOT JUSTIFIED BY WORKS (v.1-8).*  
If Abraham was declared right before God by the works he did, then he had grounds for boasting.
But, the Scriptures in Genesis 15:6 say that Abraham believed God and righteousness was credited to him. This is what the Scriptures say. So, to have a right standing before God you must turn from trusting your works to believing on and trusting in Jesus Christ. Abraham was not justified by works. David was not justified by works. No one is justified by works. But great will be your joy when you simply embrace Christ alone as your righteousness from God.

Abraham is not justified by circumcision (v.9-12). Abraham was declared righteous before God by faith before he was circumcised. Paul is insisting on is that Abraham was saved while he was still a Gentile. Abraham was not justified by a religious rite. And neither are you.

Abraham is not justified by Law (v.13-15). Paul advances his argument by showing that the promises to Abraham were not a matter of the Law, but of faith. Abraham was not justified by Law. You cannot be justified by the Law.

Abraham is justified by faith (v.16-22). Justification is by faith so as to uphold faith in God’s promises as bringing us grace, the favor and enabling power of God (v.16-18). Salvation is a promise, a promise to Abraham and to his heirs. Abraham’s faith also models for us believing God’s promises in the face of impossibilities (v.17-19). God calls him out and gives him a promise to be believed and trusted. Abraham believes that promise by faith. Believing God’s promise by faith glorifies God. So God credits righteousness to Abraham’s account (v.22). Abraham believed God’s promises, thus glorifying God and being declared righteous before God by faith. You can be righteous in God’s sight only by faith alone in Christ alone for God’s glory alone.

Abraham is justified for our faith (v.23-25). How do we leap from Abraham’s faith to our own? The for us purpose of the Old Testament is at the center of this paragraph. We read the Old Testament and, like Paul, we see these truths, believe them for ourselves and are counted righteous before God.

Therefore, faith is the instrument by which we are declared righteous by God.

By Faith not Law

Galatians 3:6

In Galatians, Paul highlights the gospel through the Scripture foreseeing the salvation of the Gentiles. In other words, the exact place of Genesis 15:6 in the Scriptures has a gospel focused reason. Abram is blessed in that he believes God. He receives what was promised through faith. So, we are blessed like Abram was, that is, through faith.

The emphasis is on faith as opposed to Law. To depend on or trust in the Law for salvation or transformation is to misuse the Law. Paul says that Law brings the revelation of sin; faith brings the reality of righteousness.
By an Authentic Faith

James 2:23

James points back to this text to highlight the surrounding texts. Abram’s faith from Genesis 12 all the way through is plain and evident to all because of what he does. What he does in leaving Ur and Haran, entering Canaan, separating from and then rescuing Lot, giving to Melchizedek and rejecting the reward from the king of Sodom all are Abram’s faith obeying or working. If he does not act as he does, then he does not have the kind of living, authentic faith through which he is counted righteous before God.

In its Present Application

So what does all this mean for us? How do we take the strangeness and the familiarity of these words and bring them home to our hearts and lives?

*YOU ARE SAVED BY BELIEVING IN GOD’S PROMISE.* His promise to forgive your sins because of Jesus’ death and resurrection. You are saved when you hear the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus, when you understand your need of being delivered from your sin and sins, when you believe in God’s promise to apply that work to you if you will bow to Him and call on Him.

*YOU ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.* Justification is the putting of Jesus’ righteousness to your account. That is done when and through your trusting in God. Believing in God is not itself righteousness. It is how you receive forgiveness and a right standing with God.

*YOU ARE NOT JUSTIFIED BY WORKS OR BY RELIGIOUS RITES.* You cannot have a right standing with God based on your good works (and certainly not your bad works!). All your own righteousnesses are as filthy rags to God. Nor can you be saved through any religious rite; that is through circumcision, through baptism, through communion or even just the act of coming forward at an invitation. You are saved only by putting your full trust solely in Jesus alone.

*YOUR FAITH IS REAL IF IT IS PRODUCING A GROWING OBEDIENCE TO GOD.* As we see from Abram so far, there are advances and obstacles, times of careful obedience and times of failure and sin. But we also see true obedience producing faith. We know Abram has true belief because he has practical internal and external change. You can know if your faith in God is authentic if it produces growing obedience.
The Reality for the Future  \(\text{v.7-21}\)

Abram has been concerned that the promise will fail because he has no child. The next big obstacle is something Abram is only dimly beginning to see. He has the promise and is living in the land, but he recognizes that he does not possess it yet. So what about the future? When will he really possess what is promised?

A The Covenant Grounded in God  \(\text{v.7}\)

Verses 7 and 18-21 are the covenant, the promise, God is making.

In verse 7, God is identifying Himself by what He has done for Abram. God has brought him up out of the land of the Chaldeans and brought him into the promised land. God connects who He is and what He does in order to sustain Abram’s faith. He says, “I am the kind of God who accomplishes what He promises.” The emphasis is not on the great wisdom or obedience of Abram in making the journey by faith, but rather on the Divine, sovereign purpose and power of God. If I can put it this way, what is important in this covenant is who God is.

God identifies the boundaries of the grant in verses 18-21. This vast bequest was promised to Abram and his descendants. They at various times through history and occupied some, but never all of this land. So there is something greater and later that is in view.

B The Concern arising from Faith  \(\text{v.8}\)

Abram then asks a question seeking confirmation. What he has so far is the Word of God. He has believed it. He has trusted and trusted in the God who has said it. But God has consistently accompanied His covenants with acts or symbols that visibly represent God’s commitment. Abram’s is not asking here as a matter of doubt, but as a man who really knows God’s ways and is seeking for the signet seal of the covenant.

Further, in his culture, treaties and covenants were “signed” through rites or rituals. This would be like having a signature notarized today. So, he believes God Word and is seeking to have the covenant notarized.

C The Confirmation through a Symbol  \(\text{v.9-21}\)

All the strangeness of these verses are two things: it is the seal of the covenant and it is the prophecy of how and when the promised land will actually be possessed. Here, the prophetic revelation comes through symbolic images and actions. These words and works will mix prophesy and promises. They will point to a future fulfillment. They will also establish principles that transcend the moment in which they are given.

First, the confirmation comes through the rite of cutting and sacrifice. God tells Abram to bring one of each of the sacrificially clean animals. Each of these animals will later become a part of the Mosaic and Levitical sacrificial system. They are slain, cut in half and laid out so as to be able to walk through between the halves. This was a common rite to secure a treaty or covenant. Once this was done, the carrion birds attempt to attack the carcasses. Abram drives them away.
God is showing Abram and God’s people the necessity of protecting the covenant, particularly the sacrifice, from contamination and corruption. He is showing them that there will be vultures who will attempt to destroy what God is doing. Abram is already, in the rescue of Lot, carrying out this responsibility.

Then, in verse 12-16, Abram falls into a deep sleep and is engulfed in a frightening darkness. Then God tells him when Israel will possess the land. The deep sleep represents his own death. He will go to his fathers in peace but not as possessing the land. The dreadful darkness represents the 400 – 430 years from the making of the covenant until the taking of the land, some of which Abram’s descendents will live in the land as pilgrims and four generations of which will spend in Egypt. Even as the book of Genesis is being written, Israel is seeing the fulfillment unfold before her very eyes.

In verse 17, God passes in between the halves thus ratifying or notarizing the covenant. But God alone passes through. Thus, Abram knows that this is an unconditional covenant, that God alone will ensure that the covenant will be fulfilled. So, the promises that God had made to Abram from the beginning, are now cut into a covenant, secured by God alone, ratified by the sacrifices. Yet, the fulfillment is a long way off. And longer than they know. But Abram, with a confident faith in God, will die in peace at a ripe old age.

Lessons

God is teaching Abram lessons we all need to understand.

**God’s promises are absolutely sure.** We now have the Lord Jesus’ notarization of all God’s promises. The authentication seal is the cross, the ink is the blood, the down payment is the Holy Spirit and the reality is an unimaginably wonderful future gazing on and glorying in Christ, serving God in perfection and purity.

**God may fulfill His promises when you are yet alive.** This sounds strange in our ears. Doesn’t real faith claim and receive what is promised right now? Sometimes yes. And that is a great mercy and great privilege. And I am so glad and grateful when, asking through faith, I receive what God is pleased to give.

**God’s promises sometimes require hard work.** If Israel is going to possess all this land that God has given them, then they are going to have to take, occupy it and defend it. So we are to hear what God has promised, be wise about His providences, trust absolutely in His power, then walk and work in faith.

**God’s promises require patient waiting.** All through the Bible, God is working in an “already but not yet” way. Abram has the promise and is in the land; but he does not yet possess. God’s promise is sure even if it is 400 years away, or 1500 years away. We think that if we don’t get what God has promised now, something is faulty in our faith.
BELIEVING GOD’S PROMISES MEANS WE WILL TRUST HIM. I am coming full circle here. Many claim to trust in God who do not in fact trust God. Many claim to believe in God’s promises who at the same time do not trust God to do what is best when it is best. Do you see the difference? The first unit here is a call to trust in God for the son is coming. The second section here is a call to trust God who will fulfill His promises, but at a time and in a way that is His alone to determine. So, do you trust in Him? And do you trust Him?

BELIEVING GOD’S PROMISES DOES NOT EXCLUDE SUFFERING OR DEATH. Abram and many generations die in faith. But they suffered in Egypt and they died. Brothers and sisters, the best time to cling to God’s promises is when it looks least like they are coming true. In difficulty, decline or even in death, trust in God, in what He has said in His Word, what He has promised to us in Christ.

Listen to Hebrews 11:8-16 in closing:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. [ESV]

So, will we be people of faith, people who believe God in an obeying way. Will we long for and look for a heavenly city, a better country? Will we die in faith even if we don’t get it all here? If so, then there is a wonderfully amazing result. God will not be ashamed to be called our God.
An Impatient Faith
Genesis 16

The man who has been walking by faith now hears and heeds bad counsel.

Introduction Why does everything seem to be so hard so often?

Sometimes Christians struggle because their own faith is weak. Sometimes Christians struggle because they listen to counsel of others whose faith is weak. Abram went down into Egypt and lied about Sarah because of fear and weak faith. But here, Sarah’s faith is weak, her counsel folly and the consequences disastrous.

What do we do when it appears that what God has promised is not unfolding on our timeline? This is a time when we can walk by faith or by sight, by trusting in the wise providences of God or by turning to the human scheming. Impatience even in faith will bring difficulties and struggles.

This is what we will see this morning. Faith will be impatient. Impatience will lead to bad counsel. Bad counsel will bring forth poor choices. Poor choices give birth to many, many painful consequences. We will see this through Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael. And, we will probably see it in ourselves as well.

Sarah – the Reliance on Human Wisdom (v.1-6)
The opening sentence says it all. Sarah has borne Abram no children. Here are people with a promise and problem.

In her Challenge (v.1)

Being childless in our culture grieves people who want children. It is sometimes a difficult problem. But in Abram and Sarah’s day, being childless was a shame, a disgrace. Childless women were assumed to have done something awful either against God or against their husbands. It is difficult for us to put ourselves in Sarah’s shoes, to feel the stigma that she bore.

Being childless when God has promised a child to Abram is a very great challenge to Sarah’s faith. Up till now, the promise has been given directly to Abram. He is the one who will father a son and many descendents. Now Sarah sees herself growing old, getting beyond the child-bearing age.

This is a real problem for Sarah. What can be done? How will she ensure that Abram has a son and she retains her position as the matriarch of the family, the tribe? Sarah devises a solution to their dilemma. She has a maid servant, probably acquired while they were in Egypt. This young lady’s name is Hagar. Maybe, Sarah reasons, Hagar is the solution.
In her Counsel (v.2-4)

So she comes to Abram with her proposal. Sarah notes that it is God who has closed up her womb. God has providentially withheld her from bearing a child. God must have another way in mind. So, Sarah will give Hagar to Abram to bear his children in her stead. Hagar will be a surrogate mother. Now, let’s stop just a moment and get oriented to the culture.

This was a common practice in their culture. Several ancient manuscripts from around this period refer to varying forms of this practice. A queen, an important tribal matriarch, the wife of a rich landowner, could take her bought and owned slave, give her to the husband to have relations with her and the child would be recognized as a full heir of the husband and accounted the son of the wife.

She may also be reasoning that since Abram is the one to whom the promise has been given and nothing has so far been said that the son must be Sarah’s (that will come in a later chapter), then as long as Abram is the father and Hagar is his concubine or wife, then that son will fulfill the conditions and be the promised heir.

I think it is easy to be sympathetic to Sarah’s plight and to her proposal. It is entirely reasonable. It rings true with human logic. It even has the strength of affirming the promise of God and aiming to see that promise fulfilled. Her motivation appears to be commendable. Her willingness to put Hagar forward might even feel like humility. Her approach to her husband has a spiritual ring to it.

However, it is all wrong. This is faith, yes. It is believing that God will fulfill His promise. But it is weak faith. It is unwilling to wait for God’s timing. It is not going to persist in faith, but rather to reason its way out through fleshly scheming. Brothers and sisters, we are so like this. We believe God but then we scheme to help God. We may have faith, but it is weak.

Abram listened to Sarah. There are times to heed the counsel of our spouses. This word heed is important here. Moses is clearly showing that this is going to be trouble. Abram’s heeding of Sarah’s counsel here is clearly being pitted over against heeding the voice of God. Commentators detect in the way the text is written a weak compliance on Abram’s part where there ought to have been a wise discernment, strong faith and a gracious, but firm rejection of this bad counsel.

All counsel and all choices have consequences. Abram takes Hagar to be a concubinage-wife. She becomes pregnant. Now, there is dissension and division as Hagar despises Sarah. She looks down on her master because she is able to do what Sarah cannot; that is, give Abram a son. She will have the favor of Abram. She may even entertain thoughts of displacing Sarah. But she has contempt for Sarah.
In her Complaint (v.5-6)

We do not know how long this situation went on. Probably not long. Hagar evidently makes no attempt to hide her contempt and disdain for Sarah. So, Sarah responds by complaining to Abram. She blames Abram for the present situation. She wants him to take responsibility for the consequences. Notice the subtle dig – “I gave her into your embrace.” In the disdain of Hagar, Sarah may feel a threat to her place and position. If Abram embraces Hagar in love, then where will this leave Sarah who has no child?

Abram is not going to take responsibility. He is not going to confront Hagar. She is not his problem. She is Sarah’s problem. Sarah ought to have known this was a likely outcome. Hagar is Sarah’s maid, her servant. She is in Sarah’s hand and under her power and authority. “You deal with it. You deal with her as suits you.”

Well, it may be gratifying to hear repeated in the Bible the kinds of discussions that often go on in our homes, but it is ungodly on all their parts. Hagar ought not to hold her master in contempt. Sarah ought not blame Abram for, in effect, taking her counsel. Abram ought to step in as head of his home and deal with Hagar. Foolish choices following poor counsel will almost certainly lead to difficult consequences. Here is an opportunity for Sarah to acknowledge her fault, to humbly yet kindly confront Hagar. But this is not what she does. She makes life miserable for Hagar. So in the early weeks of her pregnancy, with all the attendant discomforts and adjustments, Hagar is treated so badly, so harshly, that she is afraid. And so she flees.

Hagar – the Revelation of Divine Grace (v.7-14)

Hagar is now the main actor on the stage. As she flees from Sarah the camera follows her out into the wilderness. There, she will experience a revelation of God’s divine grace and mercy.

In God’s Pursuit (v.7-9)

The angel of the Lord meets and confronts Hagar where she apparently has stopped by a spring for water. She is on her way through the wilderness headed home to Egypt. This is a long and dangerous journey. But the angel of the Lord pursues her and meets her there.

This is the first reference to the angel of the Lord. This Angel is identified with Yahweh in 16:13, as well as in 22:11-12; 31:11, 13; 48:16 (Judges 6:11, 16, 22; 13:22-23; Zechariah 3:1-2). Yet the Angel is distinct from God (Gen. 24:7; 2 Sam. 24:16; Zech. 1:12). Thus “the Angel of the LORD” may refer to a theophany of the preincarnate Christ (cf. Gen. 18:1-2; 19:1; Num. 22:22; Jud. 2:1-4; 5:23; Zech. 12:8). [The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Logos Edition]. We must not miss something here. God’s heaven sent messenger who may be the preincarnate Christ confronts and comforts the persecuted and the suffering. The mercy and grace of God is embodied in the Angel of the Lord seeking Hagar.

Again, notice the use of heart exposing questions in his confrontation of Hagar. He addresses her as the servant of Sarah. So where did she come from? Where are you going? These two questions constitute a “why have you left your proper
place and are now running away?‖ She responds with the truth. She is running away. And she must return. Even though suffering and hardship may be involved, God’s loving challenge and command to her is to return to her place.

We see this all through the Bible. Our natural tendency is to escape suffering and persecution. We often just try to avoid stress. But when submission is involved, God often calls us to stay under and serve well. This speaks to us in our jobs, in our homes with children and wives, in our country with our government.

**In a Prophecy** (v.10-12)

If she is going to return to submit and possibly suffer, then she must have the encouragement of God’s Word. This prophecy here, over her descendents and her son, functions as God’s encouraging word. In this prophecy, Hagar is to recognize her being a part of the promise to Abram. She will have many descendents through a son because of God’s promise. Now this will not be the promised son, but he and his descendents will be blessed. He will be called Ishmael, that is, “God hears” because God has heard. Ishmael’s name then is a reward for Hagar and, as we will see in a moment, a rebuke to Abram and Sarah.

However, Ishmael and his descendents will be wild and rebellious. There will be constant friction between Abram’s descendents and Ishmael’s. This has been borne out in history. Ishmael’s descendents are the Arabs. They have been a constant trouble to the Jews even to this day.

**In her Perception** (v.13-14)

Hagar responds by giving a name to God. He is “One Who Sees Me” God. And she commemorates the event by naming the well where she was, Beer-lahai-roi; the “Well of the Living One Who Sees Me.” In the book of beginnings, the book of Genesis, here is the first time a person assigns a name to God. She responds to His care for her and His Word to her.

She recognizes herself as one who is always visible to God. She is stunned by *Coram Deo*. She may have thought to escape Yahweh as a local, tribal god by returning to her homeland. But now she knows there is nowhere to run from the gaze of God. One cannot flee to where the grace of God cannot reach. God sees her. Do we know this as well? Are we aware of the gaze of God on our lives?

She also understands God’s gaze is one of care and concern. So there may be a sobering effect of being under God’s eye, but that is also a satisfying effect. God sees in a way that causes Him to move towards us and even, metaphorically, to run after us. God is not only looking at us, but He is also looking after us.
Ishmael – The Rebuке of Impatient Waiting (v.15-16)

This final paragraph is to remind us that human scheming may be successful in one aspect and also bring difficult consequences as well. Ishmael, as long as he is home, will be a rebuke of their impatient waiting.

In his Birth

Verse 15 establishes that God recognizes Ishmael as a descendant of Abram. Thus, he will be blessed because of God’s promise to him. Yet, Ishmael is not the promised one. He is the son of a daughter of Egypt. When God’s promises are mixed with the world’s ways, trouble will follow.

In his Name

The point here is in Ishmael’s name. It means, “Do you hear?” Hagar will hear this as a blessing, for God heard her. But it will be a rebuke to Abram and Sarah. For the name is a question over them. Do they hear? Imagine, every time he is called to supper; every time he is honored on his birthday; every time he corrected or spanked, Abram and Sarah are asked, “Do you hear?” This has the strength of “Don’t you listen?” God has promised and they must be patient.

In his Future

One more note: this son of an Egyptian maid becomes the father of a tribe of people who will later carry Joseph into slavery and become a long thorn in the side of Abram’s descendents. For Ishmael is the father of the Ishmaelites of the rest of Genesis and the Arabs of the rest of history.

Lessons

In conclusion, let me gather up some lessons and some trajectoricide.

REAL FAITH CAN LEAD TO IMPATIENCE. Abram and Sarah believe God’s promise, but are struggling with God’s providence. They are trying to resolve the problem of having a son and growing old and unable. So we must also recognize impatience in the midst of faith. We believe what God promises, and we want it now. Isn’t it strange that even that which God promises can be an idol: we want it so bad we’ll sin to get it or sin when we don’t have it.

WE MUST BE ABLE TO DISCERN BAD COUNSEL. God holds us accountable for hearing and heeding bad, foolish, unwise or sinful counsel. It will often sound like good advice. It may come with the ring of authority from the voice of an expert. It may come through a relationship where saying no brings conflict. It may twist the Bible to justify it. It may even contradict the Bible. Often through, it is subtle in its persuasiveness. But more often than not, we are simply not discerning. We don’t weigh the advice we are being given to see if it is true, wise and holy.
ALL CHOICES HAVE CONSEQUENCES. This is a simple, but profoundly denied principle of living in God’s world. Even when we are trying to help God out, bad choices will breed bad consequences. Listen young people and teens: some of you think that sowing your wild oats, “boys will be boys”, “it’s just for now” are acceptable rationales. They are not. You will reap what you sow. No one is too young to ignore this. Many of us have “wild oats” harvests in our lives. Every choice you make will have consequences.

GOD PURSUES THE WAYWARD. The Lord Jesus Christ goes after the one lost sheep, the one lost coin, the one prodigal son. These are not unbelievers. These are those who are in the fold, part of the home, true sons. We must rejoice with God’s great grace, His concern to go after the wayward and His joy over their repentance.

GROW STRONG IN FAITH THROUGH PATIENT WAITING ON GOD’S PROMISES. Listen to what Paul wrote of Abram in Romans 4:18-21. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. [ESV] Growing strong in faith is a process. There is never arrival. This faith that is impatient will eventually become an unwavering belief in which there is no distrust. Through that growing and eventually unwavering faith, he brought glory to God by giving glory to God. And so can we. It should be so encouraging that we are on the same kind of journey. Our faith is at times strong and at times weak. Our faith at times holds fast and at times listens impatiently to unwise counsel. But it can grow and become unwavering, bringing glory to God.

Finally, a trajectory. Paul in Galatians 4:21-31 draws from this narrative a grand lesson for us. Hagar and Sarah point us to slavery and freedom. Hagar is a slave who bears a son. She represents all ways of salvation and transformation that rely on the flesh and use a law system. She represents the way to try to come to God through doing good and obeying the Law. Paul says that is earthly, fleshly, futile and deadly. This way leads to being enslaved in sin and condemned to hell.

Sarah points us freedom. She is the freewoman who later bears a son and whose sons are all true believers. She represents the salvation from God in heaven, being born of God from above. This is the true way of salvation and transformation. This is the way of turning from reliance on my good to trust in Jesus’ death and resurrection. This is being saved, not by law or good works, but by faith in Christ.

So, how do you stand? Are you trusting in your good works and thus are lost? Or will you trust in Jesus alone for your salvation and holiness? That kind of saving faith, unwavering trust in Jesus, does not boast in self but in God. That kind of saving faith, glorifies God. Will you trust Him now?
The New Names
Genesis 17

Introduction
Twenty three years is a long time. Think back to an event that was twenty three years ago. Some of you aren’t even that old. Yet, Abram and Sarah have been waiting that long to have their dreams realized, their promises fulfilled. There have been advances and obstacles. There have been obstacles for faith and for obedience. But now, Ishmael is the age to be recognized as the heir. Their bodies are beginning to fail. How will God keep His promises and thrust redemptive history forward?

God will do it by a great, faith sustaining affirmation of His promises. He will give them new names. No longer will there be questions about Ishmael and doubts about themselves. What happens in this chapter of Abram and Sarah’s lives is a great and momentous change.

Verses 1-3 and 22-27 form an inclusio, or bookends. We are signaled this in the text by the giving of Abram’s age. The structure of the text then helps us with what God is saying to Abram and is teaching us as well.

A – God Confronts Abram (v.1-3)
B – God Changes Abram’s Name Confirming the Covenant (v.4-8)
C – God Seals the Covenant Establishing Circumcision (v.9-14)
b’ – God Changes Sarah’s Name Continuing the Covenant (v.15-21)
a’ – Abraham Obeys God (v.22-27)

Let’s listen carefully to God’s Word.

God’s People are Challenged (v.1-3)
From the context to this text this is God confronting Abram. This why God will appear and will speak. So, will Abram listen? How then does God confront Abram?

In Who He is (v.1-2)
Moses leaves in silence the long passage of time between the birth of Ishmael and the final giving of the covenant. It does not take much to recognize the thirteen years of hopes and hardship, of longing for blessing for this son and of watching him becoming unruly and wild. But now at this important juncture in Abram and Sarah’s life, God appears to Abram.

God reveals Himself through His speaking and through His Name. He announces that He is the God Almighty. He is God and thus is sovereign over all. He is almighty and thus is able to do what He has promised. While there is weakness in Abram and Sarah’s bodies, there is almighty power in God. Their weakness not only is not a detriment to God’s plan, but becomes the very way in which God displays His power. So God’s name here is meant to challenge Abram to hold fast to the promises God has given.
In What He Requires

The covenant also requires something from Abram. The fulfilling of the covenant is not dependent on Abram’s obedience. But Abram must walk with God and be holy before God. This is Abram’s commitment in the covenant. The covenant then is going to command, to call for God’s people to live in a way that reflects their relationship to Him. This blameless and holy walk with God will be codified in the Law. Later, it will be fulfilled, satisfied and exemplified in the doing and dying of Jesus. God’s character and revelation set the standard for our relationship with Him. God is the one who is establishing the terms of the relationship. Abram does not dictate to God nor, even in the face of promises, decide what terms he will accept or not. That standard is not arbitrary, but is grounded in who God is and what He is like. Thus, we do not negotiate with the Almighty. We submit and walk with Him in holiness.

In How We Respond

Abram responds by falling on his face before God. This is the proper posture before a holy God. Abram’s external posture reflects his internal poise. He is bowed in his heart before God. Does our never doing this corporately reflect that we are not so bent before God? The bowing before God in His presence is not so as to cause our hearts to bow, but because our heart’s bowing force our knees to do so as well.

This is the product of a high view of God. We live in a day where God’s revelation in Christ and in the Bible is not bowed to. Strangely, we have taken all the verticalness out of our relationship with God and made it entirely horizontal. We have justified this by bringing God down so that He is on the same level as we are and all relationships become horizontal, with peers. God must ever been seen on a pedestal, on His throne.

God’s People are Changed

God has moved to reveal Himself and Abram has responded by humbling himself. Now God will finalize and ratify the covenant. Here, through the changing of Abram and Sarah’s names, we see that God’s people are changed. The changing of a name either signifies a change in status or in character. Notice what God does in how He changes them.

By Affirming His Promises

In the renaming of Abram, we see how God changes his people by affirming His promises to them. God states again all that He will do for Abram. What God is determined to do, He will affirm by changing Abram’s name. He will no longer be Abram, that is, an exalted father. He will now be Abraham, a father of many. So each time Ishmael and Abraham were called, it had the effect of “Do you listen” and “Father of many”, come to dinner! This would be a constant reminder that the Almighty can and will do what He has promised. Otherwise, Abraham’s name now is just a cruel joke.
But as though this is not enough, God also promises that many kings will come from him. In other words, he will not only father a multitude, but establish a royalty. This people and their kings will live in the land promised them. And finally, God will be their God. This is the greatest thing in the covenant. God will be their God.

**By Establishing their Relationship (v.9-14)**

God changes his people by establishing their relationship. Here at the center of the chiasm, circumcision becomes a mark of identity. It is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. It identifies them as the people of God and as being in relationship to one another. God changes them from being a family to a people group through this rite.

Circumcision was a common practice in the culture. God took a familiar practice and invested it with theological meaning. Circumcision in the culture was most often done just before marriage to indicate a change in relationship and status. It was a mark of being separated from one family and united to another to begin a family. This cultural significance, somewhat lost on us today, would have been familiar to Abram and Sarah.

Circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, just as the Sabbath is the sign of the Mosaic Covenant. All males were to be circumcised so as to be included in the promises. Only males were to be circumcised pointing us to Christ who is our circumcision. It was done on the 8th day, which has both health significance and resurrection significance. Any one who was not circumcised was not a part of the covenant.

Much confusion has come about because of erroneous teaching about the relationship between circumcision and baptism. I do not have the time to address all the issues here. But let me say this: we teach that baptism and circumcision do not directly correspond to one another in the Bible. Both point to the same thing, the work of the cross cutting us away from the old and setting us aside to the new. So we can grow and change because Jesus has died and in that death, our hearts are circumcised. Baptism then is the public affirmation, not of participating in the covenant per se, but in moving from the old to the new so that transforming grace through obedient faith changes us.

God’s people are changed by having a growing understanding of our identity in Christ and our relationship to Him. Since circumcision points to the heart work done by the Spirit in the New Covenant, then we are transformed through the once for all great change that occurred at our conversion. Then, the work of the cross, like a scalpel, cuts us apart from the indwelling sin so that it no longer has power over us. While we must have the commands of God to know what to obey, we need the truths from God to know who we are. When we believe who we are and how we are related to God, through that faith comes enabling grace by the Spirit to obey.
By Correcting their Weaknesses (v.15-21)

God also changes people by correcting their weaknesses. Sarah’s name is not changed in its meaning, but in its spelling. She has always been ordained to be a Sarah, that is, a princess. God reminds them that His plan will go forward and His purposes will be accomplished. Sarah will bear her own child.

Verse 17 is so interesting. Abraham is bowed low before God and laughing in his heart. How can this be? This is precisely Abraham’s dilemma. And so he, like Sarah later, laughs in his heart. Now the New Testament in Romans 4, Paul says that at this point, Abraham does not doubt but is strong in faith. He understood that his body was unable. But he had faith in God.

But he still has questions and once again pushes Ishmael forward (v.18). Here is where I get that God is correcting their weakness. Ishmael is the result of impatient faith. Abraham and Sarah just need to continue to trust and wait. So in a wonderful twist of irony, God announces ahead of time that the son born to Abraham and Sarah, one year from now, will be called Isaac. Why is this ironic? Because, Isaac means laughter. What smiling humorous mercy from God! What may cause nervous wondering laughter now will become joyful laughter later. Instead of being reminded that they must listen (Ishmael) they are now reminded that they can laugh (Isaac).

Their weakness is also corrected by the continuing of the covenant as it is established with Isaac, not Ishmael. There is an emphatic point being made here. It is to affirm that the multitude who are the sons and daughters of Isaac are in fact the true recipients of the covenant. It is also to deny that Ishmael has a claim to the covenant, even though he will be blessed because of Abraham.

The upshot of all this is that Israel understands what the covenant and circumcision mean. It means that they are uniquely related to God. That unique relationship grants them privileges and gives them responsibilities. In this they are God’s own people. And amazingly, they are allowed to call God their own. This covenantal relationship with this bloody painful rite of circumcision, calls on them to humble themselves before God and to walk with God.
God’s People are Compliant (v.22-27)
Abraham moves to obey God. If he is going to actually participate in the covenant, then he must be a recipient of circumcision. This is the only way. It points us to Jesus, the only way. His bloody, painful death where he was cut away from God and he cut us away from our sins is the only way. If you want a relationship with God, you can only have it the way God says. There is no negotiation. There is only humble, faith compliance.

In Personal Obedience
Abraham has to obey God personally. If he has been changed, then he will obey God. He will also ensure that his household and all his servants obey God. Such is the persuasive power of a personal obedience that every male in his household was circumcised.

It is no good trying to say that we have been challenged by God, changed by God and then are not willing to obey God. The first and fundamental change we experience is the breaking of our wills and the submission of our wants. Then we become a compliant people, an obedient people in the details of our lives.

In Painful Obedience
Do not minimize this. This obedience would have been personally painful. Abraham is ninety nine years old. Most of his household are old enough that this is going to painful. Yet they do it. They are committed to the covenant and the relationship it creates. So they will obey God, even when it is unbelievably painful, when every sense and fiber of your being shouts, “No.”

So, are you committed to painful obedience? I do not intend to merely moralize this text, but this application is inescapable. Many people who want to believe in God and may even be willing to obey God are often turned away and turned off by the call to painful obedience. I contend that you do really know if your obedience is real submission and compliance until it carries you into pain and suffering.

In Perfect Obedience
Finally, it is a perfect obedience. Jesus’ personal obedience to His Father carried Him all the way to a horribly painful death, even death on the cross. Now do you begin to see how circumcision and the cross are related? They are the personal, painful obedience that makes the author of our faith, perfect.
Let me conclude with some closing lessons and challenges.

**Are we listening to God?** I am struck again how important a hearing that heeds is in the Bible. Abraham is confronted by God, is changed by God and responds by obeying God. He is truly hearing with faith.

**Are we trying to negotiate the terms of our relationship with God?** You cannot do this. God does not bargain. God cannot be manipulated. He sets the standard and the terms of the relationship. You can only come to God by the way of the cross. If you try to come any other way, you are not God’s people.

**Do we understand growth and change?** This is not just a matter of moral do’s and don’ts as though holiness is primarily a system of ethics. Growth and change arise from our relationship to God and our identity in Christ. The faith that obeys is strengthened to obey by believing all that God has said. That faith believes all that God has said about Himself, about Jesus Christ and about us. Yes, it hears imperatives and is complaint. But it also hears the names of God and our new names, it hears about the character of God and the promises for us. Faith believes the indicatives and obeys the imperatives.

**Are we committed to a personal, painful and perfect obedience?** If you want to be a follower of Jesus, you must take up the cross. This is about shame and suffering. The way of the cross is painful. But it is the way of blessing. What painful obedience is God challenging you for today? Will you believe Him and obey Him, like Jesus, even if it means a cross kind of death?

God changes us. What a gloriously wonderful thing. Hesitant, fleshly, doubting, scheming, laughing people can become the smiling parents of Isaac. So no matter where you are sinning; no matter where you are failing, God changes people.
The Hopeful Intercessor
Genesis 18

Introduction
I was reared in a home where etiquette and manners were prized. My mother taught English and Etiquette in college. You have heard the saying, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” Well, I grew up with “Mannerliness is next to godliness.” How to entertain guests, how to sit, how to set a table, how to eat at any place setting were drilled into me. It was good in that I learned how to conduct myself regardless of the setting. It has often stood me in good stead. In changing cultures from the States, to Germany to Brazil, it is much easier to learn and adapt.

Abraham is a man of manners and hospitality. But that is not the point of this text. We do not come to Genesis 18 with a primary aim to put Emily Post or Vanderbilt on your nightstand. We come to this to see what God is teaching to us as God’s people. What does it mean that this chapter of fellowship and prayer follows on directly with God’s changing Abraham and Sarah in their identity and status and names? What does it mean that this is just before the awful destruction of Sodom and deliverance of Lot? The answers to those are what this is all about.

This unit will open and close with the picture of Abraham looking out over a scene. It opens here with his seeing his heavenly guests and he entertains them in righteousness. It closes in chapter 19:27 with his looking out over the plains of Sodom and the smoke her destruction rising up. Our chapter will leave us in the middle with his watching the angels depart on their mission.

Fellowship with God (v.1-21)
The seamless movement from chapter 17 to chapter 18 tells us Moses intends to connect these narratives. God has revealed Himself through His covenant in way that confronts impatient believers, changes them by changing their identity and their relationship and they respond with obedience. Upon that obedience God appears to Abraham again by the Oaks of Mamre. God is showing his people that having changed them, He now fellowships with them.

Communion – A Covenantal Meal (v.1-8)
Abraham is lounging in the doorway of his tent escaping the great heat of the day. He looks up and suddenly there are three men standing in front of him, but at a discreet distance from the tent. In his culture hospitality to strangers is an important aspect of righteousness. He moves quickly to greet and invite those strangers to a meal.

He recognizes who they are. There is a growing sense through the story that Abraham is aware that this is not just any three men. He rushes to invite them into his tent so that he can be their host. He invites them by offering them a wash, food, drink and rest. He offers to share his bounty with them so that they will go on their journey refreshed. He bows low before them. They are more than they seem at first. They are guests from heaven.

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When they agree, he hurries to provide for them. Notice how often Moses says this. He hurries himself to assign tasks. He runs to the herd. He presses for people to get it done quickly. He does not want his guests to have to languish. And what a feast he prepares them! Twenty one quarts of flour made into flatbread. A whole calf is freshly butchered, cooked and prepared to serve. He also has jugs of curds (maybe a yogurt like dessert) with fresh milk set before them.

He takes the place of a servant host. He brings it in and serves it to them. He then stands nearby as they eat, ready to attend to their needs and wants. He does not presume to sit down with them. He stands with, as we will find later, Sarah just behind him at the tent door.

In our Christian communities, hospitality is an important part of our holiness and relationships. Everyone in the church is commanded to have an open heart and an open home. Hospitality is a qualification for office bearing and for widows to be supported by the church. Abraham here is an illustration of the hospitality that all of God’s people are to show. Abraham’s willingness to not only serve them, but also to stand ready to meet their needs instructs our hearts. We ought to have this poise. We ought to show hospitality. As the author of Hebrews notes, heaven only knows who our guests may actually be.

**Conversation – A Covenantal Promise**

Moses records for us some of the dialog, the conversation. They inquire after Sarah. Where is she? Nearby, in the tent. Now we must not imagine our small camping tents. These tents were almost portable homes, complete with sleeping rooms, storage areas and large family areas. They are probably seated in the family area and Sarah is in one of the other rooms.

The interesting thing here is that the Lord speaks to Abraham but it is primarily for Sarah who is eavesdropping, if you will. The Lord announces that He will visit about this time next year and Sarah will have a son. Now, this is impossible. Sarah has ceased her time of month. She is totally incapable of bearing children naturally. Moses emphasizes this. Isaac will be a miracle.

Sarah laughs in heart. She well knows that she is beyond having an intimacy that will produce children. She is old and worn out. This whole notion in her mind, is silly. But the Lord hears and responds. He asks Abraham why Sarah laughed. Sarah speaks up and denies that she did. God is not going to let her get away with this denial and insists that she did.

In the midst of this conversation comes the central question with its great truth. “Is there anything too hard for the Lord?” This is a great question to ask of two old people whose bodies are unable to have children yet have a promise from God that they will. This is not too hard. Nothing God promises is beyond His great power. Isaac’s birth like Jesus’ depends upon the covenant promises and the mighty power of God Almighty. Sarah who is too old and Mary who is a virgin, will both be visited by God’s enabling power to bring a son into the world. One will be the fulfillment of promise to Abraham of descendents; the other will be fulfillment the promise to Abraham of a descendent.
At the center of our fellowship with God and His promises to us is the Lord Jesus, His promised son. All of these texts are pointing Israel to a son who will be greater than Isaac. This will be the great “son” theme through the Isaac narratives. For us, we cannot but hear this glorious message. Our communion with God and all that God is to us comes through His Son.

**Confidant – A Covenantal Sharing (v.16-21)**

The guests arise to go on their way. Their faces are set toward Sodom. As they prepare to go, Abraham goes with them to see them on their way. This paragraph is so interesting. It shows Abraham becoming the confidant of God. God seems to muse over whether He will hide something from Abraham. What he is hiding has an ominous foreboding to it. It will concern Abraham because it will involve Lot.

Moses then relates the logic of God. Two key issues play into whether God will reveal to Abraham the impending judgment on Sodom.

- **Abraham’s Standing as the Head of the Covenant (v.18).** This connects us to what has gone before. Abraham’s new status and identity, his relationship with God, means that God may confide in him. He may now need to know and has the privilege of entering into God’s counsels. Abraham’s covenant descendents will be the primary recipients of God’s revelation. It is to them and through them that God, beginning with Abraham, will set forth what God plans and purposes.

- **Abraham’s Responsibility as the Head of the Family (v.19).** God also will show what He will do so that Abraham can direct his family and descendents in a way that is pleasing to God. Now, some have taken this as a commendation of Abraham. Some translations make it sound that way. That is not the case. God is saying that because He has chosen Abraham to command his household and all his descendents, then God will disclose these things to him.

Two very important Redemptive-Historical lessons arise from this text. Both are centered on God’s revelation of His person, purposes, plans and provisions. In other words, the Word of God. God has chosen to give His divine self-disclosure largely through the descendents of Abraham. And, we need that divine self-disclosure if we are to order our steps aright.

For Abraham, God will show Him what he intends to do to Sodom so that Abraham will not be shaken over the incredible destruction that will take place. This threatens to sweep away Lot and his family as well. And, Abraham must be able to instruct and command his household so that they will truly know what is going on and how to respond to it.

What a great blessing fellowship with God is. As people who have had our identity and our status changed so that we are now the people of God, we have covenantal communion with God. We have the privilege of intimate conversation with Him centering on His promises and the Lord Jesus. We have been given deep and wonderful insight into all that God is doing, not just in our own lives, but the larger unfolding of all of history.
Intercession with God (v.22-33)

But this kind of close fellowship in the face of the wrath of God on sinners should impel us to intercession with God on their behalf. This is exactly what we see here. Now that God has shown Abraham what He intends to do, Abraham moves toward God to bow in humble intercession on behalf of Lot and the city as a whole. I love the language here: Abraham is standing before the Lord and draws near.

Character – The Justice of God (v.22-25)

Understanding the justice of God, Abraham appeals to the Lord based on His character. He approaches the Lord through asking if God, as someone who is ultimately just, would destroy both the righteous and the wicked together. For example, Abraham argues, if there were fifty righteous people in Sodom, would God wipe all of them out?

This is the main question: will a God who is able to do anything do what is just? The answer is an emphatic yes. God, who has the sovereign right and responsibility to punish the wicked will also save the righteous. In fact, a principle of justice is that, for the sake of the righteous, the wicked may be spared.

What does this mean? This means two wonderful, incredible things:

- **GOD MAY SPARE THE WICKED ON ACCOUNT OF BELIEVERS.** Many times, God is pleased to spare the wicked who richly deserve their earthly, temporal punishment because of the righteous living among them. Justice and mercy are here intertwined. Thus, the presence of believers among all the nations, may in fact be the reason the wicked are not punished as quickly or as severely as we might desire. This is a part of God’s justice, but it is still at His discretion as to when and how He extends this mercy. So we will see in Genesis 19 where the wicked are punished and the righteous are rescued. Thus, God’s justice and mercy are actually served in another way.

- **GOD SAVES THE WICKED ON ACCOUNT OF THE RIGHTEOUS ONE.** All the wicked who are saved from the eternal wrath of God are delivered because of Jesus Christ, our righteous Redeemer. This principle of “on the account of another” unfolds through Genesis. Clearly, the people of God are being taught that the justice of God is satisfied by the righteous on behalf of the wicked. This is how we are saved. Jesus, our righteous redeemer, has taken our sin on Himself, was punished in our place, so that we might receive His righteousness instead.

Finally, Abraham here acts as an intercessor. He stands as a pleading mediator, not to argue for the deliverance of the wicked, but for the saving of the righteous. Abraham is asking God to deliver Lot. Thus, like many Old Testament figures, he will anticipate the mediatorial role of the Lord. Jesus is our mediator, our intercessor. His mediation is not a pleading attempt to change the Father’s mind. But rather is the presentation of His own sacrificial death as satisfying the just wrath of God.
Compassion – The Mercy of God (v.26-33)

Understanding the mercy of God, Abraham appeals to the Lord based on His compassion. Now Abraham moves from making a legal case to making a personal appeal. This has the plaintive note of loving Lot, not wishing to see him destroyed. Yet, he knows how wicked the place is. While the justice of God will space the city (and Lot) for the sake of 50 righteous, what will move God to spare the city for as few as 10? His relationship with Abraham and his mercy on Lot will.

Abraham is both daring and hopeful. He approaches with boldness in his requests because he has experienced what having a relationship with God means. It means openness and self-disclosure. It means that, since God has shown Abraham what He intends to do, Abraham can show his heart in his appeal.

Abraham is also humble and lowly. He approaches with an appropriate understanding of his place before God. As he continues to come and reduce the number of righteous people needed to avert the justice of God, he says again and again that he is nothing, dust, low before God.

So, while his praying is bold, it is also humble. This tension is ever the case for our praying. We can come boldly before the throne of grace. But we must never come with a sense of entitlement or impertinence. We must be careful that we are not commanding God, as some teach today. Rather, we come and in our praying, converse with God and make our case. But we do so bent low as petitioners.

I believe two important and related questions are answered in this text:

How does Peter in 2:7-9 Peter know that Lot is righteous?

Why does God deliver Lot from Sodom?

The answer is: Peter knows that Lot is righteous because God did deliver him from Sodom. In other words, we are compelled by reading verses 26-33 in this chapter to conclude that God does not indiscriminately punish the righteous and the wicked together. God says that he will not destroy the whole city for the sake of ten righteous souls. Yet there are not ten. There appears to be only one. And so the city is destroyed. Lot is delivered as is his wife and daughters.

Ah, the mercy of God. Lot would not impress us for his practical godliness as we will see in coming weeks. However, God is merciful to move on Lot’s behalf. Connected to that merciful deliverance is the praying of Abraham.

Beloved, be encouraged in your praying for others that God is pleased to gather up your praying into His eternal plan. What a glorious thing it is to partner with Him in the salvation of His people in our neighborhoods and in all the nations.
As we close, let me point you to some practical applications and exhortations.

**BE A PEOPLE WHOSE HEARTS AND HOMES ARE OPEN TO OTHERS.** So often our homes are treated as safe places of refuge from people instead welcoming places of refreshment for people. Open your heart. Open your homes.

**PRIZE YOUR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD.** Not to press this too hard, but private and corporate fellowship with God are very important. You must have both. And may I exhort all of you to participate in our corporate fellowships. Flocks are our weekly time for fellowship around food, prayer and deepening our understanding of the texts in pulpit ministry. They are the core of the church. When you regularly miss Flock, you will miss out on praying for one another and on hearing initiatives for our church.

**DO NOT MISS THE LORD’S TABLE.** Abraham’s hospitality is dining with God. This is a foretaste of the Levitical sacrificial meals. It is fulfilled in our sharing at the Lord’s Table. You should be gathered with us when we have the Lord’s Table. We do not treat it casually here: our sharing the Lord’s Table is varied in its presentation and participation so that you will anticipate it with joy. Maybe the Puritans had it right: they summoned the congregation to the Lord’s Table and members as we think of it were called “Communicants”. Are you a communicant?

**PRAY MUCH FOR THE DELIVERANCE OF BELIEVERS** and the salvation of God’s people. Abraham is a model of that intercession. He is told what will happen. He responds with prayer and petition. We know the blessedness of union and communion with God and we are warned of the horror of eternal separation from God in the conscious, never ending torment of the fire of hell. Does this in some way motivate passionate praying on our part?

**REST IN THE ALMIGHTY GOD WITH WHOM NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE.** Trust in His promises and bow to His providences. Remember, it has been 23 years since the first promise and 13 years since impatience begat the trouble of Ishmael. And now, there is one more year to wait. When it seems impossible and it seems it will never come, this is precisely the time to really rest in God.

**REJOICE IN THE RIGHTEOUS ONE WHO HAS TAKEN THE WRATH OF GOD ON YOUR BEHALF.** Will the just God sweep away the righteous and the wicked together? No. He will save the righteous and punish the wicked. Believe in Him and bow to Him. Turn from your own righteousness and your own wickedness and turn to Him today. Set your hope in Him. Give your life to Him. Be transformed by the great grace He gives.
Righteous Lot
Genesis 19

Introduction

Let us begin this morning by reading 2 Peter 2:6-10. This will give us the lens through which we will approach Genesis 9.

Political correctness in our culture has partnered with the homosexual agenda to bring radical change in morality. I foresee a day when preaching as I will today will be construed to be hate speech and thus illegal. May God give us the grace to speak truly and kindly and the courage to stand when it is dangerous to do so.

Nevertheless, we have still have a sure and unchanging Word that transcends the accepted norms of what ever culture believers find themselves in. Homosexuality has been accepted in almost every declining culture in history. Romans 1 tells us that the practice of this sin and the cultural approval of it are the signs of a culture spinning down toward judgment. Yet it is precisely into that world that the gospel comes.

So, a word of caution. God has declared that sexual intimacy is only to be between a man and woman within a God-sanctioned marriage. All other intimacy is sin. However, we must have grace to stand with both Biblical courage and with spiritual kindness. So, while we must condemn the sin and the sinner practicing it, let us be careful that the way we speak does not destroy our opportunities to witness. The gospel comes as good news; good news that God delivers from the enslaving power of all sin including the sin of homosexuality. Praise God, even in the church of the New Testament, we find former homosexuals for Paul said such were some of you.

From this text, we may learn how great the sins of homosexuality and incest are. Yet, this is not the primary point. 2 Peter 2:6-10 interprets this text for us, giving us the authorized applications. Genesis 19 is about God delivering the righteous and destroying the wicked. It is about how we look and long for the deliverance of God when we are living in world gone sinfully mad and descending into dark depravity.
Lot’s Wonderful Deliverance (v.1-22)
We open with considering Lot’s wonderful deliverance, his rescue from destruction.

A Hospitable Provision (v.1-3)
This opening paragraph is meant to tie chapters 18 and 19 together. Abraham is under the Oaks of Mamre, Lot is lounging in the gates of Sodom. Here is all the difference. Yet, Lot, like Abraham, discerns that these guests, these two men, are not just any travelers. They are guests from heaven. He first offers then insists on the hospitality of his home. Because he knows what the streets and town square of Sodom are like, he presses them strongly so that they will be safe from the denizens of Sodom.

How do we know that he is aware that they are not just men? He offers them unleavened bread. This may not mean too much to us, but it meant a lot to an Israelite. In a movie, the composer creates themes associated with characters. You know that a character is about to enter because of the theme. Think of the Elven song or the Hobbit theme from Lord of the Rings. Unleavened bread functions the same way: it announces that here is something or someone from heaven.

A Terrible Perversion (v.4-11)
Some today want to change what the great sin of Sodom was. In order to make this not about the perversion of homosexuality, they say that the sin of Sodom’s men was that of inhospitality. Rather than receiving the visitors and treating them well, they attacked them. Thus, Sodom is destroyed because its inhabitants were inhospitable. Yet, verses 4-5 say clearly that the men of the city demanded that Lot deliver over these men so that they could “know” them; that is, commit homosexual rape. It is not just a few men. Moses makes a point young and old, all the men to the last man surrounds the house and demands that the angels be shared.

Lot steps outside the door to deal with the lustful mob of men. He pleads with them not to do so wickedly. And he makes a counter offer. The plea makes sense. The offer does not. It is a testimony of Lot’s own relationship with his daughters that he offers them to the mob as a substitute. These are his full-grown daughters. They are betrothed (v.14). But all of them are so callused by the corruption around them that they can engage in other wicked actions seemingly with little conscience. That he would offer them this way sets the stage for their own actions at the end of the book. Further, it is a foolish offer: he is offering women to homosexuals!

Their lustful passion enrages them against Lot’s resistance. They are threatening to break the door down. The whole household here is in grave danger. So, the angels open the door, drag Lot inside and strike the men at the door with blindness. In spite of this, they continue to grope around for the door, seeking to satisfy their perverted lust. This is what sin does. This is what God’s people are to understand about sin: it energizes, it enslaves, it ruins. These men, stuck blind, will still not relent in their pursuit of their pleasure.
A Disregarded Pronouncement (v.12-14)

Here is the result of the compromise in Sodom. Lot has lost his credibility. The angels now warn Lot that the destruction of the city is imminent. In spite of there not being ten righteous, God will now move to rescue any who will respond to the warning. Lot goes, not to his daughters, but to his future sons-in-laws. He warns them that the city is about to be destroyed and exhorts them get ready to flee.

But now the sad comment on Lot’s compromise. They think he is joking. There is little visible in Lot’s daily life that gives credence to what he says. They disregard the warning. They laugh. In contrast to Sarah’s laugh at the promise of God, here is a derisive laugh at the punishment by God. This attempt to warn and exhort seems to be going on all night. Verse 15, the sun dawns on the feeble and failing attempts to get

A Fleeing Protection (v.15-22)

Frankly, this paragraph amazes me about as much as any. Here God rescues Lot even when Lot resists! Look at the quality of God’s mercies. The angels, here called men, finally have to grab Lot, his wife and daughters and drag them out of the house and outside the city. They keep saying, “Run, run for your life. Don’t stop. Don’t look back. Run to high ground lest you be swept away!” Ah, here is another connection to chapter 18. God will not sweep away the righteous with the wicked. He will rescue the righteous.

So Lot lingers even while the danger is great. He pulls back against his rescuers. We can see how much Sodom has become a part of the way he thinks. He begs to go to a small town nearby instead of fleeing to the hills. He obviously does not understand the massive nature of the coming destruction. Instead becoming the pilgrim and wanderer he is supposed to be, he longs again for the comforts of the city. He wins a concession from the angels. He isn’t asking for much! O won’t they say OK? And they do.

Israel should have heard this with a wry humor over themselves. God had rescued them from the plaques and the wrath poured out on Egypt. But how easy it was and how they did long for the pleasures of Egypt. Lot is a witness against them and against us at how easily we are infected with seemingly inconsequential values of our culture.

Thus we must hear texts like, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” 1 John 2:15-17 [ESV] Righteous Lot is so infected with world love

Note: In the culture of the Bible, being betrothed was the beginning of marriage, even when physical union had not taken place. The wedding feast inaugurated that part of the usually weeks long wedding celebration culminating in the “honeymoon”.
that his cravings and choices are not changed even by the warning of the destruction to come.

Lot ought to cause some sober reflection and examination. He is righteous before God because he has, by faith, been declared righteous. And, he is disturbed by all that he sees. But he is also terribly shaped by the world and culture in which he lives. We have to think about this. Would Lot have recognized his own trouble? Would he have simply lived there in Sodom and later in Zoar and not seen what was the big deal? Is this possibly where we are, what is happening to us? We may have a right standing before God by faith. We may even be disturbed by the sin we see all around us. But how many of our deep desires, our real beliefs, our day to day choices are not much different than Lot’s? We do not recognize where we are worldly because we don’t think deeply about the choices we are making.

I want to challenge you again to think deeply about what is actually at the center of your life. What organizes your decisions and directions? Why do you choose to get involved in things that will take you away from serving the Lord as you can? Why do you spend all your discretionary money on yourself? What will you give up in order to gain what can’t be lost? What can you just not live without? Will you set aside whatever you have planned to do tonight in order to come to the Lord’s Table and share in worship and prayer? How many of you are irritated that in order to hear the Facility Expansion presentation you will have to change your holiday plans for next Sunday? How many would even do that? Listen, we can talk about Lot being infected by his culture and talk about our being infected by ours in theory, in principle and not really see how it is working out. It is in decisions like these that what you really believe and what you really want are revealed.

**Sodom’s Mighty Destruction**

So here is Sodom with all its glitz and all its sin about to be destroyed. The angels could not destroy Sodom until Lot arrived safely in Zoar.

**With Lot’s Wife’s Penalty**

Verse 23 tells us that it was high morning when Lot came into Zoar. The Lord rained down sulfur and fire down on the city from the heavens. This is what Moses recorded. Some have speculated over the natural means that God may have used to accomplish this destruction. Others, more insidiously, have said that a natural event (volcano, asteroid, etc.) were attributed to God after the fact. Moses does not do that. He intends for us to see the direct and active hand of God in the destruction of Sodom. Yes, it is still something real in the physical world. Just as the water that destroyed the earth at the Flood was still water on the earth, so the fire and brimstone were physical things. Yet, in both, it is God who causes and directs what happened. This is no accident of nature. This is the very wrath of God poured out on the wicked.

Now, we need to revise a bit of our thinking about Lot’s wife. The angels, in their warning to flee, told them not to even look back. Any looking back would arise from a longing to go back. This is not a severe punishment for an idle curi-
osity. Lot’s wife is continuing to long and linger. She has trailed along behind him. Note that the text says that Lot had arrived at Zoar. So whether he has entered the city or is in its immediate vicinity, we do not know. Sadly, Lot’s wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. The point here is that she becomes a monument to what longing after and lingering near what is to be destroyed may do.


Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. [ESV]

Until Jesus comes at His return, the warning of Lot’s wife needs ring in our hearts. For, if you try to preserve your life and all that is precious to you, you will lose it in the judgment. But if you are willing to give up your life for the sake of Jesus and His kingdom, then you will gain what is really life. So, with Jesus’ coming in view and remembering Lot’s wife, will you give up your life?

**From Abraham’s Perspective** (v.27-28)

We also see the destruction of Sodom through Abraham’s eyes. He arises early in the morning and goes to where he stood before the Lord. He is returned to the place of his intercession. From that hilltop, he can look out over the valley of Sodom and Gomorrah. He sees the billowing smoke arising from the fierce furnace of Sodom’s destruction. The only thing comparable for most of us would be movies of the bombing of Dresden during WWII. Or maybe you have seen some of the forest fire or disaster movies. Abraham knows now that God has swept away the wicked. His judgment is swift, terrible and just.

**By God’s Power** (v.29)

So the power of God has destroyed Sodom. It was not just the one city, but the system of cities making up the city state of Sodom and Gomorrah, the whole valley. Many believe that the present day Dead Sea is location of this valley. It is possible that the ruins of those cities lie buried under the still deeps of that Sea.

But God does not sweep away the righteous with the wicked. He knows how to rescue the righteous. And so he destroys the wicked and delivers the righteous. He rescues Lot. And Abraham’s prayers are involved. Our prayers are not nothing. God has woven them into His plan and providence. Moses intends for God’s people to be heartened in their praying. God “remembers” Abraham and He attends to our prayers. And He will rescue the righteous even in the very midst of destroying the wicked.
Daughter’s Terrible Depravity (v.30-38)
Some of this chapter has been sad and some has been sordid. The narrative now comes to a shocking end. The last word on Lot is that of incestually fathering some of the greatest enemies of Israel.

Their Wicked Plan (v.30-35)
The two daughters of Lot have left Zoar with their father and are now living in a cave above the valley. They know their future husbands are now dead. They are despairing of ever marrying and having children to carry on the family line. It is hard to conceive that it is their living conditions that cause them to think this. Rather, in their own eyes, they are now widows and not good candidates for marriage. Their father is destitute having lost everything in Sodom. They have no dowry.

So they hatch a plot. It seems to me that they recognize that Lot would not have participated in this willingly. But they also know that he will drink to excess. They get him drunk enough so that his will to resist is lowered. He doesn’t know when they came in and when they left as he sleeps off his drink. They go in to him and commit incest with him. And they become pregnant, both of them, each as a result of their night with him.

Moses clearly intends to connect this story with Noah. Both of them, after coming through the deliverance from destruction, get drunk and are sinned against by their children. This stands as a warning against drunkenness, but more importantly, against being vulnerable to temptation and sin after a hand of God has moved on our behalf.

Their Lasting Progeny (v.36-38)
Moses records this, not as a diatribe against incest, but primarily to remind Israel and the nations around them how Moab and Ammon came to be. Their names, Moab and Ammon, are a play on their parentage. The descendants if these two sons of Lot will become terrible enemies of Israel. They will pollute the land, tempt Israel to worship idols and regularly invade, pillage and destroy.

So, Lot, who had grown comfortable in Sodom, now reaps the harvest of the corruption of his daughters. The consequences would range long past his own lifetime down long years past the days of the writing of Genesis. He does not end well at all. This is all that is said of Lot.

But all is not lost with these two sons. For long in the future, a Moabite lady would marry a Jewish man. So Boaz would take Ruth to be his wife. She would marry into the Davidic line and become an ancestor of Jesus.
There are some very important lessons for us here:

First, Ross points out, “The point was clear to Israel; it should be clear today. No good can come of loving a society so morally bankrupt that it awaits the swift judgment of God – if not in a temporal judgment, certainly at the end of the age.” (Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, p. 365.)

We must be warned about the dire effects of sexual sins. Whether homosexuality or incest, whether adultery or fornication, these are all sins in God’s eyes. Professing Christians cannot keep on committing them. They will destroy your life. You must turn away from them. Young people, in our casual and carnal day, you must uphold righteousness. You must resist temptation. And you must stand for right even when it is not popular.

If you are struggling with homosexuality, whether you have acted upon it or not, seek counsel. The power of the Word and Spirit through grace can break the bonds of the worst of sins. Repent today. Turn from your sin. Seek mercy and help from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you found yourself struggling with the world, with its values and treasures? Have you been slowly boiled in the pot so that you do not even realize, maybe until today, that your choices are organized and oriented mostly by our culture? You also need to repent. You need to repent in principle, to reject the world and seek God’s will and Word. You need to change in the particulars. Where will you give up your life so as to gain life eternal. Remember Lot’s wife.

We are living in a befouled world. It is spiraling down into depravity and debauchery. But, except for brief periods in history, this is the way it has always been. And God will judge this world. Even when it feels normal to us. Even when all the decaying depravity is overlaid with pretty tinsel and sustained by exotic technologies. But all this will disappear one day in flame and fire. God will judge this world, make no mistake.

God knows how to rescue the righteous. This has been a melody running through my heart this week. If God saved Noah, of God delivered Lot, then God will deliver us. He can deliver us from being swept under by the slime of this age. And He will deliver us from the wrath that is to come.

Will you be one of those He will deliver from destruction? Have you turned away from your sin to the Savior? Will you bow to Him today? Or will you be like Lot’s wife – only going halfway in a halfhearted way, longing for what you are being asked to leave and looking back to it. Destruction awaits those who will not repent and be converted. Believe in Him today. Trust in Him today.

God knows how to rescue the righteous. And He will.
Repeating the Same Old Sins
Genesis 20

Introduction

So, here we go again. You have to wonder: why on earth would Abraham and Sarah do this again? They wander into someone else’s territory and repeat the lie that got them into trouble in Egypt.

But then, do you ever do stupid, even sinful, stuff more than once? Aren’t we prone to repeat certain kinds of sins? Let’s think about that for a moment.

There are sins that we go back to because we simply enjoy them and don’t want to give them up.

There are sins that we commit a lot because we are enslaved to them and don’t know how to have victory over them.

There are sins that woven into the way we think about life and need to be exposed by loving counsel, whether individually or corporately.

So let’s think carefully about this portion of God’s Word and the help it will bring to many who struggle with repeating the same old sins.

Confrontation: An Intervention Bringing Change (v.1-7)

Its Repeated Failure (v.1-2)

In a few brief but startling words, Moses describes for us a familiar problem. Here are Abraham and Sarah with all their clan, traveling about the land they are to inherit. They have now moving through an area that was then known as Gerar whose king was a man named Abimelech. Once again, we are told that Abraham says that Sarah is his sister. And once again, the local king adds her to his harem.

Its Dramatic Warning (v.3-5)

God steps in and in a dream confronts Abimelech. The words here are startling and frightening. “You are a dead man...” Abimelech has not yet been with Sarah. God warns him not to touch her because she is another man’s wife. Abimelech responds by protesting his innocence. He took her honestly not knowing she was married. He had been told that she was Abraham’s sister. He has done it innocently and in integrity.

Now a couple of things strike me here:

God is moving to protect the purity of marriage and the completion of His promised plan. He intervenes to keep Sarah pure. When Sarah bears the promised child there will be no question as to his paternity. Even in the midst of Abraham’s sin, God’s plan and purpose will not be thwarted.
God has allowed the situation to go this far. Here is heat in Abimelech and Abraham’s lives. God is at work to show what is in their hearts. Rather than preventing this situation altogether, He moves through it to accomplish His plan and purpose.

So we need to take note of this. God is at work even when people are sinning and even repeating a besetting sin. Now this does not excuse Abraham nor make God the cause or culprit in Abraham’s sin. So, God is at work in your life as well even in your sinning to expose your heart. Here, Abimelech is shown to be a man of integrity and innocence in this situation. Abraham is exposed as fearful, weak and deceptive.

So, God is at work in your life. When you choose your sin; when you go back and repeat the same old sins, God is at work to expose your heart to you and sometimes to others. Please hear me well – that does not excuse your sin. But it does mean that you are living your whole life before the face of God. With Abraham and with you, your king is not pleased and He is at work.

**Its Divine Instruction**

God responds to Abimelech’s protest by saying, “I know you are innocent – I kept you from sinning. However, I am telling you to make this right.” God instructs him to return Sarah and to ask for Abraham to pray for him. Further, God warns him strongly not to disobey. If he does not do what God has said, God will kill him.

Why such a strong warning? Because God’s promises and purposes are at stake. We are seeing right in the text the mystery of how God works. He prevents Abimelech sinning with Sarah and warns him not to do it and return her. Sarah is going to bear the promised son. But God is going to great lengths, even in the midst of Abraham’s sin, to protect and authenticate Sarah’s virtue. Israel and all of God’s people are being assured that there is no question that God will keep His promises, even when people fail.

Why such a strong warning? Because Abimelech, contrary to what Abraham thinks, actually does fear God. He does know and will respond to this great and awesome God. His fear of God is an important part of his conduct, his obedience. Yes, love for God and God’s love for us are one part of what compels us to obey Him. Along with that a respect and reverence for the holy power and majesty of God also compels us to obey.

This is why the book of Hebrews is so powerful. Here is an amazing, loving God who died for His people. Here is a towering majesty, a consuming fire whom we serve and obey with holy awe and fear. So we do fear God, not in a servile fear or in unholy terror – it is not a psychological phobia. Holiness does not come from theophobia. Holiness comes from the fear of awe and the attribution of power and majesty. Maybe the reason we so easily go back to the same old sins is that we do not fear, do not have an awe and respect for God as we ought.
Submission: An Obedience Exposing Sin  (v.8-13)

So, Abimelech obeys immediately. He gathers his household and servants, probably including his tribal leaders and informs them of what is going on. While it may not be obvious in the text, we have to remember that Abimelech is about to confront the most powerful tribal leader in the region and expose his lies. It is only prudent to inform his retinue before doing so.

Its Probing Questions  (v.8-10)

Then he summons Abraham and asks a series of probing and exposing questions. At the heart of the questions is nailing Abraham for putting Abimelech in a position so that he has transgressed against God. He is incredulous. What has he done that Abraham would put he and his clan under the judgment of God?

Then, God pronounces through Abimelech the decisive condemnation in verse 9. “You have done to me things that ought not to be done.” Not the least of these is perpetrating a deceit that allowed Abimelech to take Sarah as his wife. Here is a man who is innocent and did act with integrity who now has the sword of God hanging over his life and family.

Once again, we are met with the power of wise and skilled questions to expose sin and uncover heart issues. Why and what questions aimed at uncovering motivations, exposing heart beliefs and wants are at the heart of Biblical change. I love that last question he asks, “What did you see that you did this?” You can hear the perplexity and anger in these questions.

Its Revealing Answers  (v.11-13)

Abraham’s answers give the reasons for his choices. Listen to them:

They don’t fear God and thus I fear for my life. This reason was given when he went to Egypt. Right or wrong, he makes an evaluation that fuels his fear. Since they don’t fear God, then they will do anything including killing me, to get my wife. Now this fear is probably grounded in a common practice in cultures around him. Yet, is this a symptom of a failure to trust God or to make wise decisions?

I am not really telling a lie. Sarah is his half sister. Abraham is her half brother. When he asserts this, he knows that the people they tell this to will then assume that she is available. The lie is not exactly in what he says, but in what he doesn’t say. The effect is that the Pharaoh and Abimelech believed something that is not true and then acted on it without Abraham and Sarah correcting them. So, he can say what he wants, but he intends to deceive others.

This is an agreement Sarah and I have. When Abraham and Sarah left Ur and Haran, Abraham got Sarah to agree to do this. They agreed that she would say, when asked, that Abraham was her brother. He seems to have persuaded her with an appeal to a woman’s heart. “This is the kindness you can show me…” would come across a little bit like, “If you love me and want me to be around, then…”
This is the way we have always done this. Then the classic, “This is the way we have always done it all these years.” Now, notice the phrase, “at every place to which we come.” Does this mean that everywhere that they have gone where there was a powerful king they have done this? Are the Egypt and Gerar incidents just the times that the king actually took Sarah? It is possible. It is also possible that he is trying to justify himself with another half truth. In other words, “What is the big deal? We have done this everywhere and it has not been a problem. Sorry it has created a problem for you, but generally this has worked out.”

Let’s stop and think about how this relates to our own repeating of the same old sins over and over again.

Thematic Heart Issues
Thematic doubt, fear and not trusting in God are at the root of much repeated sin. Many of you will go back to the same sins over and over again because you fear people instead of fearing God. Maybe you are going too far in dating relationship because you fear if you don’t you’ll lose your boyfriend. Maybe you keep drinking too much because you are afraid of losing your friends or being ridiculed by them. Maybe you don’t give as you ought or minister as you can because you are fearful you won’t be able to meet your bills or have the lifestyle or retirement you want. Can you see this in your life?

But it doesn’t have to be fear. Maybe the reason you keep sinning is because there is another thematic heart issue. Fear of man is huge in causing people to crave affection, affirmation and approval. But there might also be coveting which fuels constant financial struggles, irresponsible buying splurges, sexual escapades and so on. Maybe a heart idol simply will not be taken down and destroyed.

Therefore we need to look at those repeated sins, those besetting sins, and see if we can diagnose the underlying root. We should look in our Bibles for illustrations of these things and see how God deals with them. We should carefully study Romans 5-8 seeing how Paul deals with sin issues. We can talk to a wise Christian friend or a Biblical counselor. Maybe our spouses will be able to help. But make no mistake, it needs to be dealt with and straightaway.

Deceit and Lying
Most repeated sins involve deceit and lying. Many of these besetting sins are deceits in themselves. People deceive their employers, their spouses, their churches in the process of committing their sins. Deceit and lying are one of the threads, one the colors in the fabric of their sin. The very great problem of deceit laden sins is that you will begin to deceive yourself. Thus, you become more and more blind to the sin and more and more skilled at the justifications.

Many of these besetting sins are covered and hidden with deceits. Lies are told to cover up both the committal of the sins and the consequences of the sins. You know what I mean: I remember the coming home late from a date and lying to my parents about having a flat tire. Listen, when you find your-
self regularly covering up for a oft repeated sin, you need help. You need the kind of counsel that relies totally on the sufficiency of Christ and His Word.

So, it will require the clear confrontation with truth to penetrate the fog of these lies. People will have to lovingly and carefully speak truth over a long period of time. Sometimes God will break it by a kind of public exposure that brings radical heart repentance and lasting change.

**Planning for our Sins**

We too often have careful strategies in place that allow or even encourage our repeated sins. Abraham and Sarah have a strategy, a promise between them. They think they are mitigating a danger to Abraham. The practice of this deceit is the “default” action. They don’t have to consult. If they are in a hostile place and people are asking about the relationship between them, the answer is not, “He is my husband.” The answer is, “He is my brother.”

In all kinds of ways, people tend to strategize, knowingly or not, in order to return to their repeated sins. You make space on your calendars and in your schedules. You have that little stash of money that you don’t have to account for. You have that bookmark on your Web browser. You know what hotels to ask to stay at. You take a certain route home, go up and down certain aisles at the bookstore or in the library.

If we will deal with these little strategies, we will often go far to conquer our sins. These deceits and strategies are the ways, in the words of Romans 6, that we present ourselves as instruments of unrighteousness. Thus, we must repent by stopping our strategizing for sin and replacing it with strategies for righteousness. We must present ourselves as instruments of righteousness.

**Habitual/Enslavement by our Sins**

Repeated sins have become habitual and sometimes, even a part of our character. Many of us grew up with the label inherited from the wise Puritans of “besetting sins.” These are sins practiced so much that they have woven deep ruts into our heart and into our behavior. They are almost like sin mannerisms. While this is probably not a besetting, enslaving sin for Abraham, we will see this very clearly in the character and conduct of Jacob. Deceiving is just what Jacob does. It is his default setting.

So, many of you return over and over again to a besetting sin. Again, I point you to the great delivering truths of Romans 5-8. If you are a believer, you are in the new realm of Christ, under grace, a slave and child of God (Romans 5). You should not live as though you are still controlled by the old realm of the flesh. You must know this truth, surrender totally to your King, put off and put on by presenting you and your body to God (Romans 6). You also must not try to live in the old realm where the Law governed. If you do, the effect of trying to live by Law is to have the flesh stirred up to do what is being forbidden (Romans 7). Now you must live as having been delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ and live in the new realm by grace in the Spirit where
being loved by God brings holiness and gives confidence no matter how hard it gets (Romans 8)

Here then is a word of hope – you do not have to be at the mercy of these sorts of sin. There is forgiveness, victory and freedom in the cross of Jesus Christ and in His enabling grace.

**Declaration: A Vindication Leading to Ministry (v.14-18)**

The final paragraph brings the conflict and tension to a resolution. In many ways, this seems so strange to us. After all, isn’t the wrong person giving the gifts and making the pronouncements? Why is Abraham seeming to prosper even more during this time?

**Its Generous Pronouncement (v.14-16)**

Abimelech is obeying God. He is returning Sarah, untouched, as God commanded. He is also doing what his culture would expect. Even though he acted in innocence and integrity, in the eyes of others, he has wrong Abraham. He has taken his wife and now returns her along with a load of gifts. He opens up his lands for Abraham to live in. Here is a great generosity, not because of Abraham, but because of God.

Abimelech also declares publicly that Sarah is pure. He has not touched her. He vindicates her innocence. This is the point of this narrative. Sarah is solely Abraham’s wife. She has never been with another man. This is critical because in the next chapter and presumably without much lapse of time, Sarah becomes pregnant with their son.

**Its Intercessory Prayer (v.17-18)**

Now that the issues are resolved Abraham intercedes for Abimelech. He has wronged this man. He has lied to him and allowed him to take his wife. He has then tried to excuse his behavior. Now, and I think decisively, he has been exposed and he will not do this again.

We now find out that because of taking Sarah, God has struck Abimelech’s family and all his household with infertility. The irony here cannot be missed. Here is a barren wife, taken wrongly into another marriage, and God judges them with barrenness. But Abraham intercedes to God who heals them.

Are not the mercies of God wonderful? Is it not so very encouraging to know that God forgives and will hear our prayers? Why should God hear this lying patriarch and prophet? God hears him, not because he is righteous, but rather because of the righteousness of Another.
I want, in closing, to give you some things think about as you respond to God’s Word.

Give thanks that obstacles do not halt God’s advances. Abraham has sinned again. He has put the purity of his wife and the lineage of his son in jeopardy. But God has moved to keep on advancing His purposes and His plans. This massive theme at the core of Genesis encourages me so much. There will be obstacles. But God is not halted and His purposes are not frustrated.

Recognize that most of us struggle with repeating some sin, often again and again. We really need the Word of God to penetrate our hearts. We need the counsel of loving brothers and sisters to show us the way. We will have the providence of God exposing us. So, we invite you to the hope that is in Christ and help that is available in this church.

Always acknowledge, when we are experiencing victory over sin, that it is God’s good work in us by grace. He keeps us from our sin. He warns us so that we will not sin. He makes ways of escape so that we do not have to sin. If your heart is full this morning because you know that you used to have a besetting sin, let that be a heart full of humble gratitude not prideful self-congratulation.

Brothers and sisters, turn away from repeating the same old sins. Turn to walking in humble trust and radical obedience to your God and King.
Being Polished by God
Genesis 21

Introduction

We have all probably had old cars. I’ve had my share. Kent Hughes relates his buying an old VW bug. It was that lovely pea green that they came in. Its paint had been dulled by the years. So while it was a fairly reliable car, it was a very ugly car. He decided to do something about it. He bought some polishing compound and went to work. With a lot of elbow grease, he was able to restore a lot of its original shine. But it took a lot of time and a lot of hard work.

God is doing this in our lives. God is at work to polish you. We get dulled spiritually by the dust of the world and exposure to sin and temptation. We need to be washed, polished and waxed so that we will shine. This is what Genesis 21 is about. These three events are linked in that they are God’s work of polishing and preparing Abraham. Yes, there are many threads and themes through this text. And we’ll talk about them. But I want you to sit up and take notice at how God is at work. God is preparing Abraham for the test of Genesis 22 and God is settling Abraham into the land.

How do we tend to respond to times when God gets out His sandpaper, polishing compound and buffers?

*You will sometimes question God and become perplexed.* This may not be wrong if you are in it moving towards God. But sometimes, this questioning and perplexity becomes a step in moving away from the Lord.

*You may resent what God is doing and become bitter.* So many people are all these “rub” areas in their lives where God has been polishing and they have become resentful and bitter.

*You sometimes become angry and turn against those God is using.* How many times are relationships broken because you will not accept the honing and shaping work of God from people? Are there these kinds of broken relationships in your own life?

*You may reject what God is doing and come under His chastening.* Sadly, there are many people who resisted and rejected what God is doing and are now under his severe, but loving rod of correction.

How will Abraham respond through these three situations in which God is directly at work? Can you see how God is at work in your life to polish you? The point here is not to give how to tips on handling these situations. The point here is to encourage you to take heart and have hope that God is at work in your life. These three seemingly unrelated events are like lots of things in your own life – what is God up to?
In the Midst of Personal Blessing  (v.1-7)
The first place where God is at work in polishing us is in the midst of personal blessing. This might come as a surprise, but God is polishing and preparing us when things seems to be going well.

God’s Direct Intervention  (v.1-2)
This is a very great high point in Genesis. Here is the culmination of a grand promise, a great faith and a long patience. Yet, it is written with almost stark understatement. In two short sentences, Abraham and Sarah become parents. When it was impossible physically, God directly intervened so that Sarah conceived and bore a child.

Let us not miss the connection to Jesus’ own birth. He was the promised Messiah. He came just at the time of God’s ordination. He was born in a way that was naturally and physically impossible. Like Sarah, Mary conceived through a miracle. Sarah’s conception was a miracle of regeneration where her physical deadness was overcome. Mary’s was a miracle of conception where the Spirit of God begat in her womb the Lord Jesus in the mysterious union of the incarnation.

Abraham’s Practical Obedience  (v.3-4)
In this time of great blessing, of hopes and promises fulfilled, Abraham continues to obey God. He is not so overwhelmed or focused on the blessing itself that he forgets what God has told him to do. So he names his son as God commanded. And, at the time God instructed, he circumcises his son. So, here is faith believing God in an obeying way.

Here is often what God is working toward in the midst of our blessings. He wants us to not forget God in the midst of His blessings. He is polishing our obedience in the good times. This is not as odd as it might seem at first. Is it not easy for us, when God is pleased to prosper us and bless us, to forget what God has instructed us? We take such great pleasure in God’s blessings that we forget that we were created in order to bring pleasure to God; or if I may put another way, to please Him. Yet, many Christians slip, slide and drift in times of blessing. In these times, God is polishing your obedience.

Sarah’s Evident Joy  (v.5-7)
This great miracle brings both joy and a bit of possibly nervous laughter. She is amazed and grateful over the miracle. She knows her story will spread wide. Those who hear will laugh with joy. Maybe some will laugh in derision. But God has been faithful so that she will bear a son in their old age.

God wants us to connect our blessings with His promises and provisions. Sometimes there are ordinary blessings that seem just to be ours. Then there are extraordinary blessings where we are acutely aware they are from God. The polishing work God is doing in blessing is for us to see God at work in it all. He desires that our enjoyment of what He has blessed us with points others to God.

Make no mistake. God is polishing you in the midst of blessing. Will you forget Him? Or will your enjoyment of God’s blessing help others to see God at work?
In the Midst of Family Conflict (v.8-21)

God is preparing and polishing people in the midst of family conflict. O, how painful family difficulties can be. Issues between spouse, between parents and children, in extended families can be so disheartening and discouraging. Yet, God is at work.

Its Initial Problem (v.8-9)

What was a blessing now becomes a point of difficulty and division. It has been as much as two years between verses 7 and 8. Abraham is noticeably proud of his son. When he is weaned, he throws a big party. The family is all there, including Hagar and Ishmael. The text here says that Ishmael was laughing, presumably at Isaac. The laughter here is probably one of derision or scorn. Ishmael here is between 14 and 17 years old. Here is the elder son who probably fully expects to be the heir and is making fun of this kid who is at the center of attention.

Its Difficult Responses (v.10-14)

Sarah is quite evidently angry. Maybe she sees a heart trajectory that is putting Isaac in danger. Maybe there has been a long smoldering resentment in Sarah that now finally bursts through. Maybe Ishmael’s laughter is just that of a happy young boy and Sarah is misreading evil into it. Regardless (and the Bible is not clear) she demands that Abraham send them away.

Abraham is not happy. This is very difficult. He is the middle of a mess, frankly of his own making. There has been the conflict between Hagar and Sarah. Now, the boys are involved. And now, Sarah is making a demand that is very displeasing. He obviously is loath to send them away. He knows the last time they left, God sent them back with a tacit rebuke of Abraham and Sarah for their handling of it. It seems that he is poised to reject Sarah’s demands and try to weather the storm.

But, God intervenes to show Abraham that, while this is very difficult, it is serving God’s purposes and plans. God assures Abraham that He intends to bless Ishmael because of His promises to Abraham. He also makes clear that this is happening in order to protect Isaac’s place in the family and his future inheritance.

So, Abraham gets up early the next morning to obey God. He loads her up with provisions for the journey. He sends her on her way. She ends up wandering around in the southern wilderness which will later be called Beer-Sheba.

Its Divine Providence (v.15-21)

Hagar evidently is lost and has run out of water. They have wandered around long enough now that Ishmael apparently has begun to fail and possible is nearing death. She cannot bear to watch him die. So she lays him down under some bushes, goes a bowshot away and sits down, weeping for her loss.

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Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born and 100 when Isaac was born. See Genesis 16:16; 21:5-8
For the second time in her life, God speaks to her. He will not allow them to die for He has plans for them. Yes, they were an obstacle to Isaac’s being the heir and had to depart so that thread of redemptive history could advance. But God also has a plan for Ishmael that cannot be thwarted. God is going to make a great people group from him just as he promised Abraham. So, God opens her eyes to see what she was blind to – a well of water nearby.

The story rather abruptly ends in a couple of sentences. God is with Ishmael. God is attending his life with protection and provision because God has made a promise He will keep. They settle in the wilderness with Ishmael becoming a master archer and marrying an Egyptian.

Its Practical Application

Now I want to think about this together. God is clearly at work in this conflict. This is not just random acts of unkindness.

*God is at work to carry out His plans.* Abraham and Sarah’s struggle with Hagar and Ishmael has not stopped God or even hindered Him. His plans will be carried out. While we might not know exactly what God’s plans for us are, we know that He will work them out, even when we are struggling with conflict, differences and division.

*God is at work to protect His people.* Isaac is the true heir and Ishmael is an obstacle. God has made sure there was no questioning of Sarah’s purity and now makes sure there will be no questioning of Isaac’s place. At the same time, he takes up and cares for Hagar and Ishmael as they call on Him.

*God is at work to mold and shape His people.* Through this, God is working on shaping and molding Abraham, Sarah, Hagar and to some degree, Ishmael. The file and rasp, the buffer and polish, may not be pleasant or smooth. But God is a master-craftsman. What he has in mind will emerge. His polishing work will produce Christ-likeness in the end.

So we should take great heart in this. Even in the midst of intense conflict, God is at work to further His purposes. He may be protecting you. He may be carrying out His promises in a way that you cannot see now. He may be preparing you for something. He is certainly polishing you so that you will be more like the Lord Jesus.

In the Testing of Strategic Relationships (v.22-34)

God is also preparing and polishing his people in the testing of important relationships. I want you think about this carefully. God has been preparing and polishing Abraham to become the patriarch in the land. Isaac has arrived and the promise of an heir has been fulfilled. Ishmael has departed and a threat has been removed. Now, Abraham secures the final piece of the promised land and begins to put down roots.

By Lasting Commitments (v.22-24)

Here is a strategic relationship – the one between Abimelech and Abraham. Understandably, Abimelech is concerned about Abraham’s status in the land. Moses intends for us to notice the order of events that lead up to this. Abimelech has opened up the land for Abraham to live in. Abraham now has a natural heir and
has sent Hagar and Ishmael away. So he comes with both a peace offering and a show of force.

He acknowledges what we often miss in the midst of God’s providences. He recognizes that God is with Abraham through all these things. So, he wants assurances, because of Abraham’s earlier deceptions, that Abraham will keep his word and act with kindness and respect to Abimelech. So they enter into a covenant that secures what Abimelech gave. It also holds Abraham and his descendants to their word.

**By Settling Differences**

(v.25-32)

In the course of their discussion, Abraham complains to Abimelech that some of his servants had seized. These were wells that Abraham had dug. In the mid-east, the digger of a well on open land owns the well itself until an agreement is reached with the local king or tribal chief. However, Abimelech’s servants have seized the wells without Abimelech’s knowledge and without due process.

Abraham then offers seven lambs to Abimelech. These are given as certifying that he had dug the wells. He is in essence acknowledging that he has been deceitful in the past and is swearing to the truthfulness of his claim. Abimelech enters into the covenant with Abraham, giving him those wells and affirming Abraham’s over-lordship in the land.

Part of the point of this is to show that Ishmael’s descendants have no claim to this part of Palestine called Beer-Sheba. Though he almost died in the wilderness in this region, Abraham has duly asserted his claim and it has been affirmed. Beer-Sheba will become an important homestead for the patriarchs right up to the time they go down to Egypt.

**By Acknowledging God**

(v.33-34)

In three ways, Abraham acknowledges God in this strategic relationship. He plants a tree as a lasting memorial to this event. He identifies and worships God as the enduring one. And, he lives in peace and safety in this area, later inhabited by the terrible enemies of Israel, the Philistines.

God is preparing and polishing Abraham to become rooted and settled down in the land. Through a time of blessing, he has his son. Through a time of conflict, God protects his heir. Through the testing of an important relationship, God causes him to put down roots and trust and worship an enduring God.

If we think about this for a moment, we can see the relevance of this for our lives. Most of us are involved in important relationships. Our primary one is here in the church. We also have strategic relationships at work, school and in our neighborhoods. God is at work through them to place us where he wants us, to cause us to serve and witness for Him and to give us opportunities to know His Name and to trust Him.
So here are some important lessons to hang our hats on.

**RECOGNIZE THAT GOD IS CAUSING YOU TO LEARN TO LIVE AS AN ISAAC AND NOT AN ISHMAEL.** In the New Testament, Paul writes to the Galatian believers in chapters 3 and 4 referring back to this text. Using an analogy, he exhorts them to live as the new man you are becoming, not the old man; to walk in the Spirit, not the flesh; to live in freedom, not bondage. All this is because Ishmael, representing the old, flesh and bondage was cast out and Isaac, the son of the promise, represents the new, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit and freedom. So God is at work in polishing you to cause you to live as a Christian.

**GOD IS AT WORK IN ALL OF LIFE TO PREPARE YOU AND POLISH YOU.** Never forget this. It doesn’t matter what is going on, everything is designed by the loving hand of God to draw you to Him and to cause you to please Him. In God’s world, there are no true accidents, just unforeseen providences where God is carrying forward His plan and purposes.

If you would call yourself an unbeliever or a seeker, let me speak to you a moment. God is not just at work in the lives of His people. He has brought you here this morning to meet this particular group of people, to sing these songs, to hear this message preached on this day. It is no accident. So may be today is the day to give your life to God, to believe in Him, to surrender to Him and to call on Him to save you. May be you are not ready yet – you have doubts or questions or are just not sure. We would be delighted to talk with you after the service.

**PLEASE GOD WHEN YOU ARE EXPERIENCING THE BLESSING OF GOD.** This is a bigger challenge than we want to acknowledge. Allow the blessings of God to cause you to even more trust Him and obey Him. Be quick in the good times to rise up and do what God wants.

**PLEASE GOD WHEN YOU ARE IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT, EVEN FAMILY DIFFICULTY.** Become the kind of person who knows what God is working on in the midst of conflict. Do not make peace an idol. Do not start a conflict without Biblical justification. Try to be a peacemaker. Trust that God knows what He is doing. Seek to know what God is teaching you and training you through the conflict.

**PLEASE GOD THROUGH THOSE IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS.** Your Christian life involves a lot of very important relationships. God is working through them to help you grow and change. Your difficult spouse or impossible children; your hard boss or tiresome co-workers; all these are relationships that God is using for your good and His great glory.

So, how’s the polishing going?
Introduction

Many of you remember your school days with fondness and warmth. Others, with frustration and humiliation. At the center of some of these memories are tests. Most good schools and teachers test their students to determine what they know and what they can do, that is, their level of proficiency in the subject. My father, as a professor of theological subjects, loved to give multiple choice tests: a, b, c, d, etc. But, he terrorized his students with every question also having (e) all of the above (f) none of the above (g) a and b (h) c and d. I had a teacher in college who, on test days, handed us blue test booklets, wrote 5 questions on the board and we were to choose 3 of the questions to answer in full. While I enjoyed these kinds of tests, most of my friends in the class loathed them.

Being tested is a normal part of life. At each point in Marine Basic Training, our son Nathan has been tested. At key points, he could not move on until he qualified. Many of us have had that experience on our jobs. We want to be accepted in a job or move up to a new level in our job. In order to do so, we have to take a qualification exam or even have certain certifications. Several of us here are certified Biblical counselors having passed a Theological and Counseling Exam to be accredited by the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors.

So it should not surprise us then that God tests His people. The opening verse of Genesis 22 says, “After these things God tested Abraham.” We are put on notice right away that this chapter is about being tested by God. In the New Testament, James exhorts us also with these words, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4)

The difficult thing about God’s testing is that it is rarely academic. It is not about what you know: the depth and breadth of your Biblical or theological knowledge. God’s testing is in the midst of the mess – it is hands on kind of stuff. It is like boot camp qualifications – full pack, rifle, run, hit the wall, crawl through the mud all when it is hot, you are tired, lonely, being yelled at and knowing that what is next is worse! No wonder James says to count it joy when tested because no testing is joyful in itself.

Know this, you will be tested by God. James does not say, “if” as though it is a mere possibility. He says “when” indicating it is a sure certainty. So, how do we not just survive testing, but actually thrive and succeed in it?

Abraham shows us the way.
God Testing His People

Genesis 22:1-19

God’s People are Tested through Sacrifice (v.1-2)

In a very simple but powerful way, God initiates the test.

It Calls for Obedience

The test calls for Abraham to obey. He must hear what God commands and do it. God is clear in what Abraham must do. He is to take Isaac and sacrifice him to the Lord. We are not talking about the kind of use of the word sacrifice that we generally do where it is painful but rarely deadly. This is a command to kill his son because God has said to.

Now look, we can get into all the argument about whether human sacrifice is wrong and whether Abraham ought to have argued with God over ethics. Please understand what I am about to say. God is free to decide what is right and what is wrong. Human sacrifice is forbidden generally yet in this one case is commanded by God. Then it is committed by God when God the Father sacrifices His only begotten Son for our sins. So don’t get tangled up in theological or ethical problems here. Face the simple fact that God is testing Abraham’s faith, his believing obedience by commanding him to sacrifice his son.

It Exposes the Heart

God says that this test is a heart exposing test. Isaac is identified as both the son of the promise and the son Abraham loves. So this test is designed to take what is deep in Abraham’s heart and bring it up to the surface. How? By the way in which Abraham responds. What Abraham believes and desires will be shown by what he does in response to this command.

This is what God is doing when He tests you. He may test you by bringing a hard command to bear on your life. He may test you through the heat of difficult hardship. He may test you by allowing someone to sin against you. These tests will expose what is going on in your heart.

It Tests What is Loved

This test is aimed at Abraham’s faith, love and hope.

*It is aimed at His Faith.* What does Abraham actually believe? Is this son and this boy alone the promised one? What words will run through his heart when he hears this command? How will he work it out so that he can desire to do what God has required?

*It is aimed at His Love.* This is the boy he loves greatly. Will he love God more? Will he turn Isaac into an idol? Will he desire the good thing of a promised son so much that he will disobey to keep that son alive? Or will his faith inform his love so that he will trust God implicitly and obey God immediately?

*It is aimed at His Hope.* What are Abraham’s expectations? Where is his hope? Will he hope first in God? Or will he put all his hope in Isaac? Will his faith in God and love for God orient his heart so that his hope follows the real trajectory of God’s promises and purposes?
God is testing your faith, love and hope. Of these three, the greatest is love. So, is there an Isaac you have at the center of your love? Do you love anything more than God? If God said, “Give this up,” what would you say no to?

God’s People Obey by Faith (v.3-10)

Abraham obeys by faith. He sets out to do what God has told him. What we see in Abraham’s response is the kind of obedience we ought to have when tested. Here are three important characteristics of tested faith.

It is a Practical Obedience (v.3)

Moses records that Abraham gets up early and begins immediate preparations for the trip. Presumably, God’s command has come during the night hours. He not only obeys, but gets up early to do so. His obedience is unquestioning and immediate.

His obedience is also very practical. He knows that where he is to go will be about a 50 mile journey from Beersheba to Mt. Moriah. He then makes lots of practical preparations. He saddles up a donkey. He cuts fire wood and takes a brazier with hot coals. He brings along two young men, presumably as both assistants and as body guards. He thinks ahead so that he will be able to complete what God has commanded.

Now you have to stop and think about this for a moment. He has had to send Ishmael away in the weeks and months earlier. He is now going to have to sacrifice his son, his promised and much loved boy. Yet, the Bible gives us no hint of emotional turmoil, psychological pain, resistance or even questioning. How can he do this? When you are asked to do the hard stuff, isn’t it easy to drag your feet; prepare, but not completely; sort of leave something out so it will fail? Aren’t we quick to question, to argue, to resist, to grumble even as we “obey”?

It is a Persevering Obedience (v.4-8)

James says that a tested faith produces steadfastness. It will produce an obedience that is deliberate and persistent. Here is a persevering obedience on Abraham’s part. He has a three day and night journey, the last day of which would have taken him past the future site of Bethlehem and up the hillside to the mountain on which the city of Jerusalem and the Temple would later be built. He had to keep on going. He has a lot of time to think about it. He has a lot of time to chatter with Isaac. He has a lot of time to hesitate and turn back.

That Abraham is obeying by faith is evident from verse 5. He tells the servants to stay at the foot of Mt. Moriah. He says that he and the boy will go on up the mountain to worship and will return. Many translations say, “We will go… We will return.” Say what? How can he say this? He is marching toward putting him on an altar to slay him. On what basis then does he think they are both coming back?

Abraham not only knows Isaac is the heir, he believes it. The author of Hebrews tells us the following, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,
of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. (Hebrews 11:17-19, ESV) So, he is going to obey and God will have to raise Isaac up. He believes this in such a way that he perseveres in practical obedience.

Then, you have the wonderful, artless question from Isaac all designed to show us Abraham’s stunning faith. “Hey Dad, knife, wood, fire — where’s the lamb?” Abraham does not say, “You are.” Abraham says, “God will provide for Himself a lamb.” We are starting to move into the center of the story with this statement. This test of obedience for Abraham teaches Israel and all God’s people an important lesson: God will provide the lamb and will do so for Himself.

**It is a Perfect Obedience**

(v.9-10)

The scene here is almost too hard to imagine. He builds the altar. He lays the wood. He puts the knife nearby. He ties his boy. He lays him down on the altar, like he has many a lamb before. He takes out his knife. He raises it, ready to strike. His faith in God, love for God and hope in God impels him to a perfect, a complete obedience. He is poised to go all the way.

What about you? What is the test like for you? Is your faith, love and hope in God move you to practical preparation, pressing through difficulties all the way to total and complete obedience to God?

**God’s People Trust God**

(v.11-14)

The Angel of the Lord in the voice of God reaches out and grabs the wrist of Abraham to stop the descending blow. He calls out Abraham’s name and the test is done. God’s people obey God when they trust:

**In the Greatness of God**

(v.11-12)

God now affirms that the purpose of the test has been met. It is now evident that Abraham is willing to sacrifice anything, including his son, to God. He does so because he fears God. If I can put that phrase this way: Abraham trusts in the greatness of God. True, holy, fear of God both trembles and trusts. A real, inner conviction of the greatness, majesty, sovereignty of God causes believing hearts to tremble lest they disobey and trust so that they do.

Ah, maybe part of the reason Abraham’s obedience seems so foreign to us lies right here. We believe in the greatness of God. We believe in such a way that we might even rest in it. But we often do not believe it in such a way that we tremble under it. We had better have a respectful awe of such a glorious and grand God. We need to so elevate Him in our thinking that such a sacrifice makes holy sense to us. Nothing should be withheld from such Greatness.

**In the Character of God**

(v.13-14)

God then points Abraham to the ram in the thicket. Abraham gathers it up, takes his son off the altar and worships God through offering it instead of his son. He names the place, Yahweh-Jireh, God will provide. Abraham has trusted the char-
acter of God. He has believed that God is one who will provide. He will provide his son and heir. He will provide if he sacrifices his son. He will provide a lamb. This is how he has obeyed. He knows His God so well that He just rests in Who God is and does what God requires.

So, do we? Will we? Do we know God so well that when hard sacrifices are required we simply move in trusting obedience? When we ought to obey a hard command of the Bible, do we then think through who God is, what He has promised, how He has moved for the good of His people and glory of His Name? Or do we fidget with doubt and disobey?

I am going to be pointedly personal in taking this into the realm where we all live. This is not about God speaking to you over something you treasure as though the response to this message is to have a Mt. Moriah here tonight and everyone bring in something that is valuable to you to give to God to show you get it! You and I should be hearing this message over the commonplace things that God requires and yet we don’t do. We don’t do them because we do not fear Him and we do not trust Him. If we cannot obey God in the ordinary duties of being a Christian, what will we do if asked to surrender in an extraordinary requirement? What about your obedience in loving your family, in parenting your children? What about believing God in an obeying way in your relationships with Christians, in serving God, in faithful stewardship and giving? What about obeying God in helping others and serving others?

So, will you count it all joy when you have trials and tests so that your obedience, even a sacrificial obedience, will result in steadfastness?

God’s People Receive Hope-Giving Assurance (v.15-19)

God is pleased to not just give Abraham His approval, but also to affirm His promises. God declares again, over Isaac, His great purposes and promises for Abraham and His heirs. God’s people receive hope-giving assurance:

From the Word of God (v.15-18)

While Abraham is hearing this directly through the voice of God, we hear these kinds of approvals and affirmations through the Word of God. Yes, we hear what God promises and purposes with the affect that we have assurance and hope. In the midst of and coming out of testing, God is so pleased so often to bring sweet assurance and peace in your heart.

For a Confidence in God (v.19)

Abraham returns with his son and servants. And for the first time, we are told that he lives, not sojourns, in Beersheba. The nomadic wandering designed to claim the land is now largely ended. He settles down in Beersheba. God’s hope-giving assurance brings a serene confidence in God.
So, how do we navigate through this so that the net of truth yields a rich crop of application?

First, have you ever asked yourself, “How do Old Testament believers sacrifice animals and yet don’t trust in that animal’s blood for their redemption? How do they know that the sacrifice of the lamb represents something larger and later?” This chapter is the answer. Here, a son is brought to sacrifice. God provides a substitute, a ram in the place of a son. So all the lambs, rams, calves, pigeons sacrificed are in the place of a son until the true Son comes. Until the greater Isaac comes, until Jesus the Lamb of God is presented, sacrifices are offered in believing faith that God will forgive sins. God will provide Himself a lamb. He did. He provided Jesus, the Son of God, as the final sacrifice. He suffered the descending blow of the wrath of God so that we who believe may go free.

How is your obedience? Is it immediate, practical, persistent in the face of obstacles and complete? Or are you filled with doubt, hesitation, resistance and thus, with disobedience?

Will you surrender to God so that you will sacrifice what God requires? Do you fear Him in His awesome greatness and rest in that greatness as well? Will you with fierce love and faithful trust obey God regardless?

Take inventory. Weigh the character and caliber of your walk with God.

So, we face this individually. We also face this corporately. Will we surrender to God as a church when God requires us to give away a treasure we prize?
What about Dying?
Genesis 23

Introduction

Death is a common experience of all of us. Many of you know what it means to lose a loved one to death. When I was a teenager, my father was killed in a traffic accident. After years of living in Africa, facing death from wild animals and disease, to die in a car wreck in an American highway seemed almost stupid. He lacked only one class to complete his Masters. Yet, God was pleased at that precise time to take him home.

Death is a part of living in a fallen world. God warned Adam that if they disobeyed Him, they would die. Their disobedience brought suffering and death into the world. That is now passed down to generation after generation. We all expect, short of the Lord’s return that we will all die.

Death is a hard time of separation and grief. It is hard sometimes to communicate the sense of loss and emptiness. This sense of separation is designed by a good God to remind us of our separation from Him and how often we are insensible to it. The sense of loss draws out the depths of our compassion and love for one another.

Dealing with grief is often difficult because of heart issues. God is at work in the midst of this time as well to expose where our hearts are doubting, disobedient and desiring relationships in a way that displeases God. So unresolved grief comes because:

- We were too close to the person. They were an idol of our hearts. We had put more on the relationship than God designed for it to bear. These kinds of relationships, often with parents or children, leave us depressed and angry, often unwilling to be consoled or comforted.

- We were too distant from the person. There are unresolved relational difficulties. We have unforgiven words and deeds between us. We said things to them we regret and we can never take back. We never got to know them like we ought. This will often leave us with vain regrets.

Death often leaves us with hard questions.

- Why do people have to suffer in dying? We stand by the bedside of someone we love and watch the terrible suffering. Why does God allow this, particularly for Christian people who love Him and have walked with Him?

- What about lives seemingly ended too early? I have had the funeral of 2 children in my ministry – my dad was just entering a new phase of life and ministry. Their lives were snuffed out early by accidents and disease. Is this a life incomplete in some way? Or is God really in control and these few years were all that is ordained for them?

- What about unfulfilled promises? What do we do with people who have clearly banked their lives on God’s promises and die before seeing them fulfilled?
Some of these questions are what Genesis 23 is all about. We are confronted with a problem: someone who has been given a direct promise from God now dies without receiving that promise. Why is this the center of this story? Because this chapter begins with Sarah’s death and ends with Sarah’s burial. Everything in between is about securing a burial plot for her.

**The Terrible Reality of Facing Death (v.1-2)**

Despite what some people and groups teach, most of us will face death. Yes, the Lord may come back and rescue us from the experience of death. But death is an almost inescapable reality. Even a long life like Sarah eventually comes to an end.

**As Experiences of Loss (v.1-2)**

Sarah and Abraham have been married at least 100 years. Imagine having a Centennial Anniversary Celebration. They have had a long life together with many challenges and changes. They have walked together with God and sometimes had serious failures. They have trusted God and waited long for Him to keep His promises. They have also run ahead of God and brought trouble and trials into their marriage.

But, Abraham and Sarah were very close. His grief is not just a public performance. This is real searing pain in loss. She has been his wife, lover and friend for longer than any of us have even lived. This is a great loss. Most of you have experienced this in some way. You’ve lost a loved one – a parent, a child, a close friend. You know the inexpressible emptiness of that loss.

**With Expressions of Grief (v.2)**

Abraham, the great patriarch and man of obedient faith, expresses his loss in mourning and grief. He is sad and weeps. In his culture, he may have even torn his clothes and poured dust and ashes over his head. He is no stoic. He does not see the holiness of stiff upper lips. He experiences his loss and expresses his grief. But he does so in a way that does not give in hopelessness. He does not spiral down in long, self-focused depression or despair. His grief is guided by His faith in God.

Paul tells us that Christians grieve too. We just do not grieve like the rest of the world as though we were without hope. We are saddened in our loss. We grieve and weep at separations. But we must not grieve like the world. There is all the grief counseling that is available from secular sources. The books touting the stages of grief have been popular. As usual, those books study and speak in the context of unbelievers grieving. While they may tell us what grief is, they cannot tell us what grief ought to be, though most of the books try.

The Bible tells us that people will experience loss and express grief like they do everything else – it will be determined by their hearts. You will feel sorrow in a way that is shaped by what you believe and what you desire. A heart that is poured into the world’s mold will be filled with doubt, anger, frustration, depression, despair and self-focus. But a heart that is shaped by the Word of God and
surrendered to the will of God will experience loss, and will be comforted and find hope.

In other words, Christian funerals ought to look like what all the rest of Christian experience is like. It is mingled sorrow and joy. It is tears and it is singing. The funeral of a Christian should be so focused on God that the hope we have is clear to all who see us grieve.

Sarah’s death raises a very great question. What does it mean when a person has a promise from God and then dies before that promise is fulfilled? Has God lied to Sarah? The way Abraham responds tells us that he understands God’s promises are not limited to only the present moment. God’s promises often have a beyond the death-line element.

The Simple Responsibilities of our Faith (v.3-16)

Isn’t it interesting that the bulk of this chapter is taken up with what seems to us a pointless negotiation for land? Why doesn’t the chapter focus in on what interests us? Why don’t we hear more about how long Abraham grieved? Why do we not see him moving through the so called “stages of grief”? Why doesn’t Moses help us with how we talk to our children about death? Why, is the Bible so concerned with Abraham’s acquiring a burial plot?

Because Abraham is again expressing his faith. He believes so strongly that God will give his descendents this land that he will insist in burying Sarah here.

In a Request for a Burial Plot (v.3-9)

Abraham approaches the titular lords of this portion of Palestine, the Hittites, seeking to purchase property around Hebron to bury his precious wife. He refuses their offer of the use of one of their tombs. He knows that in order to stake his claim in the land, he must own it. He is not simply looking for a place to put her. He intends to bury her on land he owns. He wants that ownership to be acknowledged by their descendents.

This is in contrast to the Lord Jesus who was buried in a borrowed tomb. He needed no tomb on land his own. He was already Lord of all. He would not need some permanent place for He rose from the dead. His promised land is all the universe beginning with heaven!

Abraham restates his request to purchase a piece of land. He identifies the piece he wants and its owner. He asks the Hittite rulers to appeal to the owner on his behalf.

In a Negotiation for Ownership (v.10-15)

Apparently, Abraham did not know the owner by face. Ephron was sitting around the council table. On the face of it, it appears that Ephron is being generous in offering to give the land to Abraham. However, according to the custom and law of the day, that ground would be Abraham’s only as long as Ephron lived. Upon Ephron’s death, it would be returned to Ephron’s descendents. It may be that Ephron was being generous, not realizing that Abraham is looking away from the present to a long distant, by faith seen, reality.
Abraham then enters into an intense negotiation to actually purchase and own the land for Sarah’s burial plot. He will not allow Ephron to simply give it to him. He wants to own it outright. So he argues for a price to be set so that he can pay Ephron and have the title to the land in his own name.

In a Finalization of the Purchase (v.16)
This paragraph brings this purchase to a close. It leaves no question that Abraham has staked out a further claim on the promised land. He has paid the full price for the land where he will bury his dear wife. He is confident in God’s promise. He knows that this will be a permanent place for his descendents.

This sense of returning to the land as a confidence in God’s promises causes both Jacob and Joseph to desire the return of their own caskets to the land. They require an oath from their children that when they return from Egypt, they will not leave their remains in Egypt. Following Abraham’s lead, they know that the Promised Land is theirs and their people’s. So they want to finally be buried there. They plan and prepare for it.

The Glorious Anticipation of Future Fulfillments (v.17-20)
In this concluding paragraph, Abraham takes possession of what will not yet be fully his. The death of Sarah is heat in his life. The good fruit of buying the burial plot arises from faith in God’s promises and a desire surrendered to God’s providence. So the land is signed over to him. He buries his beloved Sarah in anticipation of God doing what He said He would.

In Present Preparations
We are challenged here by Abraham’s faith. In the midst of death, with faith in God, he does the simple things that his faith requires. Is it not easy for us to sometimes take some truths and then bend them to serve our sins? Some Christians at Thessalonica took the doctrine of Jesus’ return and used it to excuse their being lazy and busy-bodies. Paul challenged them take that very truth as grounds to diligent work and faithful ministry as an expression of believing.

With Future Hopes
Do you have a settled confidence by faith in what God promises? This future oriented confidence is what the Bible calls “hope”. Abraham had a sure hope that his descendents would settle in the land. He had to wait. But he was confident it would take place.

Where is your hope focused? Is your hope for this world in bank accounts, retirement portfolios, the stock market? Is your hope for eternity in your good works, your religious activity, your spiritual heritage or traditions? Our hope is to be in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to put our hope in who He is and what He has done. A sure future with God is grounded only in believing in Jesus who has lived, died and raised from the dead. Your hope is only sure when you have bowed to Him. He invites and calls you to surrender. In surrendering to Him, you will find peace in the present turmoil and assurance of all that He has promised in eternity.
Lessons

How do you handle the death of a loved one?

If they are a Christian, then we know that the separation is temporary. We know that the glory awaiting them the other side of the valley of the shadow of death is so wonderfully great. And we know that we will see them again when Jesus comes and all believers are reunited with Him.

If they are not a Christian, then we know that the separation is permanent. This realization ought to fuel great gratitude for the salvation God has given you. It ought to spur a greater effort in giving the good news of the gospel to your family and friends.

How do you help Christians who are grieving?

You comfort them with truth (1 Thessalonians 4:13,18). Quiet, loving, comforting words of truth about their present state and our future blessedness will encourage them. We can remind one another that death is not an end, but an entry. While the passing is painful, the arrival is glad and glorious.

You care for them in love. Your being there to share with them, to listen to them, to reminisce with them – just send across your relationship the depths of your care and compassion.

You confront them when necessary. I know this sounds odd. But a Christian whose grief is overwhelming them must be both consoled and confronted by God’s Word. If you are helping someone who has lost someone they idolized, help them surrender their wants and will to God. They must acknowledge that God is their all in all. If you are helping someone who has lost someone they have a broken relationship with, help them to repent of the sins they committed against that person. Help to acknowledge and receive the forgiveness of God, even when they cannot restore the human relationship.

How do you respond the present failure of a promise? This is a huge area of concern for many of you. Yes, a death may cause you to consider this. But many of you wrestle with the apparent failure of other of God’s promises. I want to think about this for a moment.

Be sure that the promise is yours to claim. Many promises God makes in the Bible are to specific people or people groups. God does not promise any of you a son who will have many descendants. None of us have been promised all the land that we walk around on. Many Christians take promises aimed at God’s people in the Old Covenant and try to claim as their own. The problem here is not a failure on God’s part to keep His promises, but on your claiming what is not yours to claim.

Many promises in the Old Covenant are re-shaped by the New Covenant. The blessings of long life, financial prosperity, continued good health if we will obey God are fulfilled for us in Christ. We may or may not experience these fulfillments in this life, just as the promises of punishment are taken on by Jesus in His death, the promises of prosperity are anticipated in His resurrection.
Many promises are imbedded in the already-not yet structure of redemptive history. Now, hang in there a minute. All I am saying is that God has promised that there will be healing through the redemptive work of Christ. Occasionally, we experience the special grace of God’s miraculous healing in this life. We will all certainly be healed of all our sins and diseases in the life to come. We will have a glorified body that is not corrupt and cannot be corrupted. But not yet… This same principle works for all these sorts of promises.

Many texts that are taken as promises are not promises at all. Particularly in the Psalms and the Proverbs, we cannot take declarative statements about the nature of life and things and turn them into either commands or promises. To do so will bank your hopes on false trusts. For example, many misuse, “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it,” as a promise that wayward children, raised Biblically, will one day return. This verse is not a promise. It is an observation of the way things are. Children trained a certain way (right or wrong) will have difficulty changing as they grow older. I find a great many of the promises in the “Promise Books” are not promises at all. It is frustrating and folly to take a simple statement in the Bible and turn them into promises.

Many promises have surprising heart impacts. For example, Hebrews 13:5 says, “Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” How is the promise of God’s abiding presence supposed to cast out money-love and give contentment? Because we are supposed to be satisfied with God as our all. His nearness is our good. Many promises are like this. So we need to be on the lookout for heart trouble that is settled by surprising promises.

Finally, you do not get your promises based on the amount of your faith. I am amazed that we have allowed this to creep into our understanding of the Bible. We may have a full and complete faith, trusting totally in the promises of God and never receive them in this life. We may, like Sarah in the land and Abraham for a city, are awaiting a great and future day. And we may well face death before receiving the promise. This is not a failure of our faith; it is the freedom of God’s sovereign providence.

What about dying? What about being a Sarah with a promise and yet dies before it is fulfilled? Listen to Hebrews 11:13-17. These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Ah, there it is – greet them from afar for we are pilgrims and exiles. What about dying? It is the way to go home!
Loyalty and Faithfulness
Genesis 24

Introduction  Loyalty – this word rings in our hearts from the brave sacrifices of American soldiers to the fierce devotion of much loved dogs. In between is loyalty to teams, jobs and spouses. Sometimes it seems that we are losing the sense and sensibility of what faithfulness and loyalty mean. It can be lost in the pursuit of self-centered agendas or bent and twisted in the demand for ignoring moral failure.

Charles Dickens wrote of one of his characters in A Tale of Two Cities, “She was truest to them in the season of trial, as all the quietly loyal and good will always be.” This is the good servant of our text this morning: spiritually strong, faithful and quietly loyal.

Explaining a story sometimes is like explaining a joke – it just ruins it. So our preaching road map for this chapter will be a bit different. As we work through Genesis 24, I want us to focus on the flow of the story in a Bible Reading style. Then, we will at the end, draw out the central truths and help you engage them for the sake of your life and walk with God.

Listening through the Story
(All Scripture Text from the English Standard Version, Crossway Books)

A Commission for a Servant  (v.1-9)

The story opens with Abraham’s commissioning of a servant for a most important task.

Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2 And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh, 3 that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, 4 but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.” 5 The servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” 6 Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there. 7 The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. 8 But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.” 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.
Abraham wants to provide a godly wife for his son, Isaac. He knows the wickedness of the culture around him in Canaan. So he sends his most mature and able servant to go back to the family homestead and there find a wife among God-fearing people. There are two requirements: he must bring the wife to Canaan and his son must not be required to go back there. In a solemn oath, the servant takes upon himself the responsibility.

**An Obedient Dependence on God**

(v.10-28)

Now, let’s watch his obedient dependence on God.

10 Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. 11 And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. 12 And he said, “O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. 13 Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. 14 Let the young woman to whom I shall say, ‘Please let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.”

15 Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. 16 The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. 17 Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water to drink from your jar.” 18 She said, “Drink, my lord.” And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. 19 When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.” 20 So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels. 21 The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not.

22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, 23 and said, “Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?” 24 She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.” 25 She added, “We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night.” 26 The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD 27 and said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master’s kinsmen.” 28 Then the young woman ran and told her mother’s household about these things.

This servant, who is likely Eliezer mentioned earlier in Genesis, makes the long trip back home to the city of Nahor. Abraham knew that his brother had children
who had married and they had children (See Genesis 22:20-24). The servant goes where he does, not on a whim, but with the wise instruction from Abraham. But he has no clue as to the lady God would have for Isaac. Imagine the sense of responsibility. So, he does what God’s people do: he prays in dependence upon God. He is recognizing that God is not just at work in the miraculous, but also in the day-to-day mundane flow of events. So this is not a sign or a fleece. God is pleased to honor the servant’s dependence on Him and interrupt his prayer by bringing the right girl along at the right moment. Thus, the servant’s prayer request is an expression of reliance on the power and providence of God.

So, God brings Rebekah, a beautiful young unmarried woman, to the well at the right time. She does exactly what the servant had asked God. His dependence on God means now he is confident to approach her and to ask for lodging in her father’s home. He learns that she meets Abraham’s requirements. He praises God for the answer to his prayer.

**A Humble Appeal in Boldness**

(v.29-49)

The story now moves to the proposition in a humble and bold appeal.

29 Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. 30 As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister’s arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, “Thus the man spoke to me,” he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. 31 He said, “Come in, O blessed of the LORD. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.” 32 So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. 33 Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, “I will not eat until I have said what I have to say.” He said, “Speak on.”

34 So he said, “I am Abraham’s servant. 35 The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys. 36 And Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has. 37 My master made me swear, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell, 38 but you shall go to my father’s house and to my clan and take a wife for my son.’ 39 I said to my master, ‘Perhaps the woman will not follow me.’ 40 But he said to me, ‘The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from my clan and from my father’s house. 41 Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.’

42 “I came today to the spring and said, ‘O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go, 43 behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, ‘Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,’ and who will say to me, ‘Drink, and I will draw for your camels also,’ let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master’s son.’
45 “Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, ‘Please let me drink.’ 46 She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, ‘Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.’ So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. 47 Then I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor’s son, whom Milcah bore to him.’ So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. 48 Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master’s kinsman for his son. 49 Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.”

The great humility of the servant Eliezer is seen how he makes his appeal. He identifies himself as the messenger of his master. He relates his prayer to God and God’s providential answer. As he relates all this, the attention is on his master and his great God. One of the effects of his speech is to see if Laban and Rachel will resonate with it. Will they rejoice in God who has moved like this?

May I note one thing here? The last sentence that makes up verse 49 is proof that Eliezer is relying on ordinary providence not special signs. If her family does not consent, then, he goes on to find someone else. God’s providence has brought him to Rebekah – but that does not mean that Rebekah is identified as the only one Isaac can marry – he can move on. So, those who want this story to be about Divine guidance still have to take into account this most important element.

A Gracious Granting of the Request (v.50-60)

Ah, what a gracious granting of the request yet a love that wants to cling!

50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing has come from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51 Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the LORD has spoken.”

52 When Abraham’s servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the LORD. 53 And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. 54 And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, “Send me away to my master.” 55 Her brother and her mother said, “Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.” 56 But he said to them, “Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master.” 57 They said, “Let us call the young woman and ask her.” 58 And they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will go.” 59 So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham’s servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,
“Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate them!”

The family gives their assent. The servant shares the gifts that Abraham has loaded him down with. The next morning, the family wants to delay their departure, but bow to the servant’s persuasion and Rebekah’s consent. They give their blessing both rejoicing in her marriage and recognizing Abraham’s covenantal status.

A Joyful Union in Marriage (v.61-67)

The story closes with the journey, the meeting and the joyful union in marriage.

61 Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

62 Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. 63 And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. 64 And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel 65 and said to the servant, “Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. 66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.

The servant brings Rebekah home to Isaac. In the Lord’s providence they meet out in a field away from eyes of others. The servant rehearsed what God has done. So Isaac and Rebekah are married. He takes her into his mother’s tent, indicating that she is now the clan matriarch.

For the first time in the Scriptures, we have recorded for us that a man loves his wife. In fact, after the Adam and Eve narrative, this is the next marriage recorded in any detail. The trajectory of the marriage motif in Scripture has gone from Adam and Eve to Isaac and Rebekah. It will, much later in Scripture, land on the Lord Jesus and His Bride, the church.
Bringing the Story Home
So what is God’s intent in this story? How do we go from days of Abraham and Isaac to the days of computers and space travel?

Faithfulness, the Central Theme
First, this is a story about faithfulness. The Hebrew word hesed is worked out in the four major characters in this text. Faithfulness in this sense is a loyal love. Each of these, Abraham, the servant, Rebekah and God all act out of loyal love, faithfulness.

Abraham acts with faithfulness to God’s covenant.
He prepares for the future in obedient faith in God’s promises concerning Isaac. He believes what God has said and then moves with practical steps of action to bring about what God has promised. He prepares and plans for Isaac’s marriage to a godly wife. His loyal love to God causes him to practically plan for the future.

The servant acts with faithfulness to his promise to Abraham.
He perseveres to carry out his responsibility in obedience to his master and to keep his promise. He depends on God, prays to God, thinks and plans carefully, overcomes obstacles and objections all out of loyal love to his master.

Rebekah responds with faithfulness to the promises of marriage.
She listens to what God has done, to the proposal of marriage and the prospects arising from what the servant promises. She recognizes the providence of God. In loyal love for God, banking on promises she believes, she moves forward into the unknown.

God acts with faithfulness to His character and promises.
Underlying everyone’s faithfulness is the faithfulness of God. He is behind every scene in the story. That He is carrying out His purpose and exercising His power moves the men and women to believe Him in an obeying way. In an expression loyal love, God meets their need in the midst of the ordinary flow of life.

God’s people, in response to the faithfulness of God, respond to Him in loving loyalty. This is what sustains God-pleasing relationships. We commit ourselves to faithfulness in all our relationships, working out the tension that sometimes creates by prayer and dependence on the powerful providences of God.

Providence, the Focus of Trust
We have here an example of how we can focus our trust in God who is at work in our lives. I know we assert this often. But this is important to remind ourselves of this often. While it may seem that God is absent in our world, He is not. He is intimately working in the midst of the mess to bring about what He has planned. This is not fatalism, where we just bow to the immovable forces of fate or chance. No, this is humble trust in a holy and loving God moving to show Himself to be great.
This is a critical element in our thinking about the way of wisdom in decision making. God’s will is that you obey Him, make wise decisions and rest in the providences He brings. What a restful place this has been for me over many, many years. To even be able at points to, like the servant, lean against the wall a bit and watch the amazing hand of God guiding the ways and paths of men.

**Dependence, the Highlighted Characteristic**

The world today despises dependent people. But this is the highlighted characteristic here. The servant stands out as a person who is dependent on God. It emerges through his praying and his praising. These two aspects of our lives most clearly show what or whom we are dependent on. The servant prays. God moves in His ordinary providences. The servant perceives God at work. Then, he praises God. He rehearses several times what God has done. Does this mark our own lives? Do people see and hear in us a radical and practical dependence on God in our prayers, our perception of things and in our praise?

**Lessons**

I want to close by framing some questions for you.

Does loyal love to God cause you to practically plan for the future? Our believing in God and our resting in His promises and character should cause us to be diligent in our planning and preparation.

Do you depend on God, pray to God, think and plan carefully, overcome obstacles and objections all out of loyal love to your heavenly Master?

As a believer, do you engage God daily in these steps of dependence: a need arises (a problem); you pray in dependence on God; you do what you must and should expecting His providence and power to move; you perceive the working of God; then, you praise Him to Him, to yourself and to others.

Maybe you are here this morning and have not thought about your relationship with God in this way at all. Maybe for you, God is here for you, not you for Him. For you, God is someone who is supposed to ease life and give you significance and importance. May I challenge that thinking as gently as I can? You are here for God, whether you realize it or not. He is the King, sovereign and supreme. Thoughts like these are unworthy of Him, disloyal to Him and an expression of rebellion against Him. This is what the Bible calls sin. It has separated you from God and brought you under His judgment. But He sent His son into the world to take the punishment you deserve. Jesus Christ died on the cross and was raised from the dead so that you can believe in God and bow to Him. These are first steps of love and loyalty to God. Won’t you consider them today?

In loyal love for God, banking on His promises, do you believe God and move forward with confidence into the unknown? Our lives should show an outward and inward reliance on God that gives a sense of confidence and hope. Misplaced loyalties and misdirected loves will undermine this. May I commend to you a fierce loyalty to God as an expression of your love for Him.
Does faithfulness, loyal love, mark your marriage? Aim the gaze of your heart on your spouse along. Do not betray that love. Do not think or act with disloyalty. Keep your covenant. Keep your promises.

In expressions loyal love, God will meet you in the midst of the ordinary flow of life. Not that we see everything becoming God. Rather, we see God’s hand working in everything. Here is the place of rest and peace. Even when involved in great responsibilities and important ministry or work with the whirlwind and mess and temptations swirling – ah what sweetness there is where we know that our faithful, our loving and loyal God, is working all things for our good and for His very great glory.
The Circle of Life

Genesis 25:1-28

Introduction
A few years ago, Disney produced what has become a classic animated movie. The Lion King told the story of passing of one generation and the coming of another with the wonderful music of Elton John. It was based on African tales but had a distinctive New Age message in the story and in the lyrics. Many people believe in the underlying myth – that death and birth are the keys to the circle of life.

When we read our Bibles, we are struck both by the reality of death in a fallen world and the wonder of life in birth. So while death and life are a part of our world, they are not its essential truths. The round and round of birth and death moves time and history forward. At the heart of birth and death is birth and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The circle of life linking two generations of families unfolds in this text. One generation goes home to God and the next gives birth to twins. Let’s think about this together.

Growing Old with Grace

(v.1-18)

Alexander Solzhenitsyn reflected on growing old with grace in these words:

Aging is in no sense a punishment from on high, but brings its own blessings and a warmth of colors all its own. There is warmth to be drawn from the waning of your own strength… You can no longer get through a whole day’s work…but how good it is to slip into the brief oblivion of sleep, and what a gift to wake up once more to the clarity of your second or third morning of the day… You are still of this life, yet you are rising above the material plane. Growing old serenely is not a downhill path but an ascent.

This is a grave challenge (pardon the pun) for many. How do you grow old with grace? How do you keep from becoming cranky, complaining, self-focused and self-centered? How do you, in Piper’s phrase, “grow old with God?”

What I want to observe from Abraham is the richness of his own end. While Moses does not intend to provide a manual for Christian seniors, he does show us the wisdom and winsomeness of a man whose life is “full of days”.

Providing for His Own

(v.1-6)

Moses records that Abraham marries Keturah who was never more than a concubine-wife (1 Chronicles 1:32). She gives him 6 children whose families are also recorded. Each of these become tribes and eventually, people groups, known to Israel as they are preparing to enter the Promised Land.

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7 Cited by Kent Hughes, Genesis, Crossway Books, p. 325.
As he approaches death, Abraham is careful to secure the rights and inheritance of Isaac. He designates him as the true heir and actually transfers ownership of all to him. To the sons of his concubines he lavishes them with gifts, the word here indicating extravagant wealth. He then sends them away into the east country leaving the Promised Land to Isaac alone. All this is recorded for the sake of Israel as they approach the Promised Land to conquer and settle it and for the sake of the descendents that they might understand whose land it actually is.

Abraham then secures the covenantal promise for Isaac. He believes God in an obeying way. Once again, and I emphasize this, Abraham’s faith causes practical actions. He believes Isaac is the son of promise; he believes the land is theirs; so, he ensures that Isaac alone inherits and inhabits the land.

Believers have a responsibility in this area as well. We are not the heirs of physical land, but of heaven. Believing God means that we do what we can to ensure that the spiritual heritage God has given us is transmitted to our children. So we guard the gospel and we give the gospel in hope that God will be pleased to grant grace to our children.

Further, we have a responsibility, as much as lies in our power, to ensure that our children actually receive what God has been pleased to entrust to us. This believing and obeying God means we do the practical things in our culture of keeping our wills up to date, taking advantage of asset preserving tax shelters and teaching and training our children on being good stewards. Next month, during stewardship month, we will be conducting practical workshops during our evening services to help you believe God in an obeying way over these issues.

**Going Home to God**

Abraham lives 38 years after Sarah died, his life full and complete. His last years are not a decline, but an ascent. I love the language here: an old man and full of years. He goes home to God and is gathered to his people. His sons, Isaac and Ishmael, gather to bury him beside his beloved wife.

Moses records that the inheritance Abraham gave Isaac is accompanied by the blessing of God. This is God’s affirming Isaac’s status. The blessing of God lies with those who are in the covenant. Isaac then settles where God has manifested himself.

As we contemplate the departure of beloved senior saints, let us consider them full of years. The frailty of Helen Duncan and the weakness and sickness of Jim Feustal all should draw out care and compassion as we watch people full of life prepare to go home to God. God measures out our lives. God knows the instant of our conception and the moment of our death. The cycle of life is in His good, wise and sovereign care. No one’s death is a surprise to Him. This is both something to comfort us and to sober us. My friend, do you know the length of your days? And when the parting moment comes, are you going home to God?
Settling Outside the Homeland (v.12-18)
As a final securing of the covenant and its promises, Moses bookends the death of Abraham with Ishmael’s descendents. He appears at the funeral, but is not an obstacle to Isaac receiving what was his. Ishmael and his twelve sons inhabit the region to the west and continue, in their generations, to be “over against” all their neighbors. This is not a location phrase, but a relation phrase showing that his descendents turn out to be what God has said to his mother.

But God still blesses Ishmael on account of Abraham and God’s promises to Abraham. He has twelve sons, comparable to Jacob’s twelve later. They all become leaders over tribes, just as Israel will have later. But the blessing, while real, provides a counterpoint and a counterfeit to Abraham’s decedents. They will eventually challenge and even go to war over the land. This conflict which has marked the middle-east has extended even to today.

Giving Birth with Pain (v.19-34)
The second element in the cycle of life is birth. This chapter is a massive transition in the book of Genesis. The Abraham section is closing and the Isaac section is beginning. In three chapters, the life and character of Isaac is unfolded for us. We do not have a biography here; Isaac is largely seen as a praying and spiritual man who is also oddly weak and self-indulgent.

Situations that are Difficult (v.19-21)
As with his father, Isaac’s wife is barren. She has no children. She and Isaac are the line of covenantal descent. So this is a grave concern. They are married when he is forty (v.20). They are married for almost 20 years without children (v.26).

But we have seen Isaac to be a man who communes with God. So he prayed to God – prayers based on God’s promises. The word is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to speak of entreaty and agonizing. It is linked to sacrifice and worship. Isaac is not just casual about his request and its need. He is passionate before God. We don’t know how long he prays. But we can be encouraged in our own praying that God may interrupt our prayers with immediate answers like the servant in the prior chapter. Or God may, because of His agenda and purposes, allow us to pray for years before granting what He has promised.

Situations then can be difficult because of the need. They can be difficult because of the intensity of our prayer to God. They can be difficult because of the waiting for God to intervene and act.

God is pleased to answer. Rebekah conceived and is carrying twins. So while Isaac and Rebekah are the designated covenant recipients, God wants to demonstrate that His giving of the heir is at His own timing and with His direct intervention. God’s providences may be in the natural and ordinary flow of life. Sometimes, God’s providences are direct and even miraculous. In both of these last two chapters, we see men of God, desiring and even needing God’s intervention, praying with earnestness based on the character and the commitments God has made. This makes Biblical praying different from all others. We are not, through ritual means, trying to satisfy a distant and uncaring deity. We are en-
gaged with the Sovereign God who is poised to hear, yet acts in accordance with His own counsels of wisdom and purpose.

**Struggles that Need Help** (v.22-23)

But from the beginning, there is trouble. The twins are struggling together in the womb. Some translations soften this into words like “jostled”. The Hebrew is much more powerful than that. It is the idea of a titanic struggle – smashing into one another. After 20 years of childlessness, now her pregnancy is horribly difficult. The children almost seem to be battling in her womb. The narrative here begins to anticipate the life-long struggle between these boys.

It is terrible for Rebekah. She has no answer in the normal course to explain the problem. It seems that she sought help. No one can give a human answer for why this enormous struggle which she would have experienced primarily as pain, discomfort, gyrating movement. Can you imagine trying to sleep or even function normally like this? She reaches the end of her rope with the “If pregnancy is like this, why did I want it?” It is possible at this point that she does not know that it is twins. She only knows the terrible discomfort and pain she is experiencing.

So, she inquires of the Lord. Commentators are divided as to whether this is an inquiry through a prophet or whether this is direct. The language here seems to me to be direct. She is struggling. She goes to the Lord seeking an answer. And the Lord answers her.

This is oracle speech. He uses the paired couplet common to Hebrews poetry. In effect, God sings His response. Two nations and two peoples, one stronger than the other, the older serving the younger are trashing about in her womb. This is not just a physical problem, but the titanic struggle of redemptive history, in this moment of time, focused in her womb.

This text is loaded with theological truth which the rest of the Bible unpacks. At the heart of that is God’s sovereign and free choice to elect the younger instead of the older, Jacob instead of Esau. In the natural order, Esau would be the heir. The lineage would pass through him. But, in God’s sovereign freedom, he chooses Jacob instead. He does so, according to Malachi 1:2, not because he saw anything in them, but because of His own freedom to choose and love whomver He pleases. *I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob.* [ESV]

Paul reads this cluster of texts and writes in Romans 9:6-18:

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. 9 For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son.” 10 And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call— 12 she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”
14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. [ESV]

Paul sees here that God has exercised His free choice before either of the boys have sinned or done anything right or wrong. The conclusion they draw is massive. God is free to set His heart on whomever He pleases. He does so of His own will, not foreseeing any of their actions and not based on their worth or merit. This weighty (and to some, worrisome) truth is not just applied to these two boys, but to Israel as a nation, to Jesus as the elect servant and then, by Paul to individuals.

Sons who are Different (v.24-28)

She perseveres and the boys are born. “Behold, it is twins!” The oracle is now very clear. There are two of them. No wonder the trouble, No wonder the pain and discomfort. And look at them. Look at how different they are. Moses means for us to see more here than just a physical description of Esau at birth. He describes him in a way that is almost animal-like. It is intended to have the audience sort of draw back – here is a baby that at birth is covered in red hair, like a fur cloak. The word for red here is closely associated with earth. He is of the dirt; he is Adam-like. So, this red haired baby is called Esau. Also, these two words, red and hairy, are forms of the words Edom and Seir. This boys descendants would be known as Edomites and would live in the region called Seir. They would become the mortal enemies of Israel.

Jacob is born second. But he comes out grasping the heel of Esau. The struggle in the womb goes on at birth. He is named Jacob. It is from a word that means, “God will protect” and “standing behind”. That word and Jacob’s name rhymes with the word for “grabbing the heel.” So, at this point, the astonished and happy parents, recognizing the fulfillment of the oracle, name their son with a positive name. But the word has another meaning as well. Imagine my consternation in Germany to finding out that the German word pronounced like my name (albeit spelled different) means, “an elephant’s trunk.” It accounts for the occasional perplexed look when Germans asked me my first name. Jacob also means, “deceiver, supplanter, sneak.” Someone who grabs another by the heel is attempting to trip them up, to cause them to stumble. So he will become famous in the psalms as the one God loves, you sinner, you worm, Jacob.

Verse 27 tells us that the boys were not only different at birth, but also grow up to be very different in their character and conduct. Esau becomes an outdoorsman. Jacob, a homebody. But there is more here. Esau is being described as wild and uncouth, a man ruled by his wants, his immediate perceived needs. Jacob is being described as tamed, controlled, civilized, a man of thought, reflection and self-control.
The hearts of their parents start to be exposed – Isaac loves the hunter because he brings him his favorite game; Rebekah loves Jacob, presumably because he is a quiet man around the “tent”. But the division between the boys begins to drive a wedge between the parents. They will carefully look out after the interests of the one they love the most. This will lead later, to a whole nest of deceit, intrigue and hatred.

As we close, how does the circle of life impact us so that we will be pleasing to our God?

An important idea emerges from this text and shapes the rest of the Bible. The New Testament book of Hebrews talks it in language like, the Old is passing away and the New is being established. Just as God chooses the younger and supplants the older, so the Old Covenant is fulfilled and completed in the New Covenant. God is pleased to carry out all that He has promised, centering it on the Lord Jesus and completing it in the church.

A word of warning to parents. At some level, favoring one child over another is just human – we all do it. But the way we respond to our children is often over the top and thus is expressing and exposing our hearts. We may love our wild meat too much. We may crave for the delicious company of kids around the kitchen table. God’s Word exposes these loves as cravings and inordinate affections – they will become the root from which many evil fruits will spring. Love your children – but love them in a way that is grounded in your identity in Christ, is graced by your love for your spouse and guided by the principles of God’s Word.

There is a circle of life – redemptive history centers on the birth and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Why is that? Because the great problem for people is not psychological wholeness, self-esteem and worth, health, wealth and prosperity. Your greatest problem is not the gas prices, the job market, the latest rap song, or funky hair. Your greatest problem is your sin and the separation from God. It is what the Bible calls, spiritual death. This alienation, this separation from God will end ultimately in your separation from God in the eternal torments of hell. But Christ has come, died on the cross and was raised from the dead so that you can be restored to a relationship with God. But it requires that you believe and bow: that you believe in God and these facts and that you bow to God as Lord and Master of your life. This is your day to end the cycle of death and enter the circle of life, the circle of eternal life with God.

In new Age mythology, the circle of life is just the endless repetition of birth and death. But the Bible teaches that the circle of life is under the wise, good and purposeful hand of a sovereign God. He loves with a sovereign freedom, chooses as He pleases and brings about the good of His people and His own great glory. This is our Ruler and Redeemer – worthy of our love and adoration.
Despising the Important
Genesis 25:29-34

Introduction

Our story opens with the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. They had long been waited for and prayed over. Rebekah had suffered much during her pregnancy with them. At their birth and as they grow up, they turn out to be very different. We tend to think of twins as looking a lot alike and being a lot alike. Not these boys.

We are told in verses 27-28 how different they were. The description here is subtle and yet intended to convey much more than it seems on the surface. There is a real tension of the admirable and contemptible in both.

Esau is portrayed as an outdoorsman, a man of the field, a hunter. He is skilled and self-sufficient. He is able to bring home the venison. His dad loves him for it. This is not, in and of itself, the problem. The problem is in his character. He is rough, impulsive and sensual. The Hebrew here intends to convey the idea, as Kent Hughes points out, of a “shallow man, a lout” ruled by his impulses. (Hughes, Genesis, p. 336).

In contrast, Jacob is a man of the tent, cultured, civilized and self-contained. In the king lists of the same time period, admirable kings who were cultured and sophisticated were identified as “men of the tent.” But he is also calculating, conniving, scheming. He has the special love and attention of his mother.

So this is the setting. This is just a run of the mill, sinful and dysfunctional family. The parents show partiality to their children in sinful ways. The children grow up playing to that partiality. These very different boys are headed down very different paths. Conflict is almost sure to ensue.

God had also told Rebekah that He was going to reverse the normal order in the family. Verse 23 says, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.” [ESV] Jacob, the younger, would become the leader of the family. The older would become his servant. Malachi, interpreting this event, says this was the sovereign choice by God. Paul, in Romans, argues further that God, in this sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau, did so of His own free purpose before either Jacob or Esau had done anything good or bad.

Our text today is about how all this started to come to pass…
Hearing the Story
Let’s follow the story as Moses records it for us. I want to emphasize its structure so we can follow it more clearly.

A Jacob Designs (v.29a)
Jacob has prepared the meal in view of the fact that Esau is out on the hunt. It is likely that they are not at the tent where they live, but are out on a trip together, possibly at a sheep station. This is no happenstance. The hunter is tricked and trapped by an even cleverer hunter. Jacob has seen Esau come and go. He knows he tends to over extend himself. He knows that he will come in from the hunt hungry and thirsty. He knows that Esau is the slave of his appetites. So he prepares a red lentil soup, thick and savory as bait for his prey.

B Esau Arrives (v.29b)
Esau arrives from the hunt, famished and weakened. Just as Jacob seems to have expected, Esau comes back and he thinks he is starving. You can see him, can’t you? He is covered in dust and sweat. He may even have carried home the game he has shot. His lips are dry. He feels weak. He sags wearily into the tent and there, wow, he can smell the delicious aroma of Jacob’s soup.

C Esau Demands to Eat (v.30)
So, Esau demands some food. We get what are full, even sentences here in our English. The Hebrew scholars point out that Esau is speaking in short, guttural exclamations. He is saying, “Let me gulp it down!” “Give me some of that red stuff, red stuff.” He is exhausted, famished and now foolish.

D Jacob Requires Him to Sell (v.31)
Here is how we know that Jacob is not just taking advantage of the moment, but rather has plotted to take advantage of the person. He immediately offers his soup in return for Esau’s birthright. Here his brother is famished, exhausted and weak and Jacob is going to sell him a bowl of soup in exchange for the family inheritance.

What is the birthright? This is the family inheritance that normally would go to the eldest son. Esau would become the family leader and priest. The family line would pass through Esau down to his sons and grandsons. Esau would be the recipient of the promises to Abraham and to Isaac. It was a great privilege, involved great wealth and a recognition of God’s promises and purposes.

But God had told Rebekah that the younger, meaning Jacob, would take the place of the elder. Eventually, Jacob would be the heir. This was a promise that God had made. Now, Jacob, acting out of the deceits and conniving of his own heart, is going to help God out. He is going to be sure that he gets what he was promised, even if it means taking advantage of his brother.
E  Esau Disparages His Birthright  (v.32)
“Out of the mouth, the heart speaks,” the NT says. Esau’s words in the moment are not just casual words that don’t mean much. They are a reflection of his heart. He has no real use for his birthright. He does not believe in it so He does not value it. He is then quick to trade it for a brief meal to satisfy his immediate hunger. Now look, even if he is actually on the verge of death – which I seriously doubt – he is ready and willing to trade it for food. He is a foolish man ready to give away his whole inheritance for a bowl of bean soup.

D  Jacob Requires Him to Swear  (v.33)
Ah, but Jacob is ever ready to take advantage. He is not going to just take Esau at his word, he wants him to swear it over. Esau, in full view of what he is doing and get a bowl of soup, signs over his inheritance, its position, priesthood and privilege. He swears to Jacob that he can have it if Jacob will feed him.

C  Esau Proceeds to Eat  (v.34a)
Esau takes the food and gulps it down. He eats and drinks. His appetite is satisfied. His belly is full. He is not going to die! So everything is going to be OK.

B  Esau Departs  (v.34b)
Esau gets up and goes on his way. He probably thinks he has won. After all, who in the world is going to believe Jacob? There is a casualness about this that is quite stunning. If you had just traded away the accumulated riches of Abraham and Isaac, the privilege of being the one through whom God would fulfill His promises, don’t you think you would be more concerned?

A  Esau Despises  (v.34c)
The final sentence captures it – thus, Esau despised his birthright. He had something that was actually valuable, rich and wonderful. But he rejected God’s definition of what was important. His heart had defined food and hunting and being alive as the most important things. Therefore he craved food more than his birthright. In fact, he despised it.

Look at the verbs where Esau is the subject. He arrived; he demanded; he ate; he drank; he left; he despised. Here is a man who is casual and carnal, just doing what he always does without real consideration of what is important, valuable and lasting. Just another day in the neighborhood.

Moses means for Israel to understand that they cannot be like either Jacob or Esau. They must not despise the very great and glorious promises of God and the privileges of being the people of God. Nor can they use sinful means to bring about what God has promised.
Crossing the Bridge
So what are we to make of all this? I want to highlight some very important observations and principles here.

**People live out of their hearts.**
Do not hear me to be saying that people are controlled by their emotions. This is not what the Bible means when it teaches that people are controlled by and live out the thinking of their hearts. Esau’s actions are determined by what he is thinking. He acts the way he does because he thinks the way he does. Esau sells because he despises.

How does that happen? His heart has defined and described the birthright in such a way that he does not treasure it. Instead of being something he truly desires it is something he despises. This is not some appetite driven, momentary lapse. He does not value something that is truly important and so he trades it away.

You do this as well. You define in your heart what you believe to be truths and treasures. You then desire, move towards, pursue what you value and push away, move back from what you despise. The great danger is when you fail to believe what God says, agree with Him about what is true and what is a treasure, you will not desire nor choose what pleases God. You may well dismiss what is actually of great spiritual or practical importance.

**People often allow their appetites to control them.**
Again, people are not controlled by their bodies. An appetite for drink, food or sex is simply a bodily function. To be controlled by one or more of these is a heart problem. In other words, if I desire food or sex in such a way that I sin, it is because my heart is sinful and depraved, not because by body controls me. My bodily appetite is controlled by my heart’s desires. Then, over time, my heart’s desires become the slave of my bodily appetites.

So Esau may be famished and hungry. Jacob’s soup may be delicious and savory. But he is willing to make the trade at the moment because his heart does not value the importance of his spiritual and physical heritage. When people become the slave of the union of their inner and outer appetites, then they are vulnerable to being used by people, tempted by sin and attacked by Satan.

Praise be to God, we do have to be the slave of our appetites, our inner and outer desires. Romans 6 says that we have been crucified with our Redeemer so that we have been delivered from the power of the flesh, the old man we used to be. But, if we continue to present (a heart choice) the members of our body (the physical instrument) to sin, we can once again become enslaved to sin. So, yield yourself and your body to God so that you are mastered, in heart and body, by your great and gracious King.

**Wanting even a good thing too much will cause you to sin.**
Jacob clearly illustrates something I say to people all the time in counseling. A good thing, a good want can become a bad master, a idol when you want it so badly you will sin to get it, or sin when you don’t have it. These idolatrous wants
are most often couched in “need” words. Instead of saying, I want food, love, martial intimacy, success, obedient children we will say, “I need…” This want, pretending to be a need, will then cause us either to commit a sin to gain what we wanted. Or, it may cause us to sin when we are unable to get it.

This is what is going on with Jacob. He wants the inheritance. It may even be his because of God’s Word. But he wants it so badly he will connive, scheme, trap and take advantage of his brother’s sinful weakness to get it. And so will you. We are not now talking about wanting an evil thing. We are talking when you even want what appears to be good and godly. It is a good thing to want to minister to as many people as possible. It is a terrible thing to give away the gospel in order to have a crowd. It is a good thing to want obedient children. But that can master us or become idolatrous in such a way that we will disobey God to get it. How many husbands, loving peace too much, have stopped confronting their wife or children? Maybe that promotion has just dangled out there and cutting a corner or cheating just a bit will bring it home? Maybe your husband just won’t lead the family like he should so you nag him or you are sullen and angry. Brothers and sisters, even wanting a good thing must be bowed to Jesus, submitted to His perfect will.

**Jesus is a contrast to both Jacob and Esau.**

Jesus has a high regard for the treasures His Father has defined for Him. So much so that He was willing to give up His own life to secure that treasure, the salvation of His people. Further, He is willing to wait for the full inheritance until the Father is pleased to bring it to fulfillment. He does not chafe or resist or seek to circumvent the Father’s will. He is ever and always bowed to the will of His Father. So He does not despise the great inheritance His Father planned for Him nor does He pursue in ways that are displeasing to His Father. Do we follow His example?

**God is sovereign even over our sin.**

Here is a difficult, but hope giving truth. God is going to elevate Jacob over Esau. He has chosen to love Jacob and hate Esau. He has done so, not in view of what they would become, but simply because He is free to love whomever He chooses. This is simply what the story of Esau, the response of Malachi and the teaching of Paul in Romans tells us.

But, in accomplishing what He has purposed, God gathers up all our sin into that plan. He did not make Esau despise his birthright. He did not cause Jacob to ambush Esau. But He works their sin into His sovereign plan. Thus, through the sin of despising and discounting his inheritance and through the sin of deceiving and taking advantage of his brother, God’s will is accomplished.

Now look, if you deny this, then you will have to deny the cross. God, from eternity past planned the fall, the cross and our redemption in history. He planned for Jesus to die on a certain day at the hands of certain people. The sin of the Jews, the Romans, and even the disciples all wove the tapestry of Jesus’ death on the cross. Yet, every sinner who participated in Jesus’ death is held accountable for their sin. Listen to what Peter says in Acts 2:22-23. **Men of Israel, hear these words:**
Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. [ESV] God delivered Jesus to the cross through His plan; wicked people executed that plan and they, not God, are accountable for their wickedness.

Now why is this a great, hope giving truth? It is a wonderful thing to know, that while I am accountable for my sin, God is never thwarted by it. He has woven into the tapestry of my and all who touch it. This is a measure of God’s greatness and grace to us. I have such peace, not to minimize my sin in the past or to excuse the possibility of sin in the future, but rather to know that God’s purposes and plans are moving with stately majesty to final day.

One final and sobering warning over the life of Esau from the sermon that we know as the book of Hebrews.

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; 16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. Hebrews 12:14-17

Conflict and carnality may destroy your life with consequences you will be unable to change. Esau was profane, unholy, despising what was spiritually important and so sold his birthright for a little bowl of soup. The consequences for him were irreparable. Yes, he had great regret. But he could not change what had happened.

So, do not fail to obtain the enabling grace of God. Use every means to get it. Use every opportunity to exercise it. For the love of God and sake of your souls, do not despise what is important lest you come to a sad day when you reap what you have sown.

So let us pray and let us sing as a heartfelt prayer, Change my heart, O God.
God with Us

Genesis 26

Introduction

God is everywhere. The truth of the omnipresence of God is clearly taught in the Bible and confessed by true Christians everywhere. Kent Hughes points out that we need to remember that all of God is in everywhere (Hughes, Genesis, p.339-340). He is not like atmosphere a portion of which is in this room and another portion of which is in the lobby. All of God is everywhere. This is because God is our ultimate environment. It is “in Him that we live and move and have our being,” Paul told the philosophers of Athens.

But God has also declared that His people are to think of Him as being with them in a way that is greater, more special and more comforting than His omnipresence. We are not just in the presence of God. We are the special objects of His interest. We all know this. We have all had the experience of being present in a room with someone while not being the object of their interest. So, while God is omnipresent – He is everywhere – He is also with His people in a special way.

One my mentors in exposition is a man named R.C. (Dick) Lucas. His Lucas Lessons have helped many expositors think through texts. One of those lessons is called Shape up! Dick reminds us to use the text to provide us with its own structure when it is there. For example, the Psalms are broken down into stanzas for a reason. Our preaching on the Psalms should be “stanzaalted”. Moses gives us three repeated phrases that structure the logic, the ideas, the flow of this text. They are huge spotlights illuminating the truth that Isaac, the people of Israel and all of us need to learn. In verse 3 God promises for the future that He will be with Isaac. In verse 24, God promises for the present that He will be with Isaac. Finally, in verse 28, the ungodly recognize that God was with Isaac in the past.

So, while Isaac is the recipient of the covenant, he is now walking in Abraham’s steps. Sometimes he does so in faith and sometimes in folly. Moses clearly intends to set this narrative as a parallel to that of Abraham’s in Genesis 20-21. God had promised to be with him; now, how would he live if that promise is true?

We, Isaac, Israel and all of us need to learn that God will be with us:

- In our sojourn here on earth;
- In our struggles and hardships;
- In our being recognized as under the special care of God.

Let’s think then about what it means for God to be with us.
In our Pilgrimage (v.1-5)

Key Verse: Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you (v.3)

Moses opens with a clear allusion to the Abraham narratives earlier. In the context of Esau rejecting his birthright, Moses shows us Isaac enjoying the privileges of that birthright. He is walking in Abraham’s steps (even to a bad degree) and is receiving the covenantal care and blessing of God.

With its Challenges (v.1)

But that experience comes in the midst of real life with its own challenges. Here is Isaac living in the Promised Land. Yet, there, a famine comes. The water dries up, the flocks struggle and the crops fail. Having inherited all of Abraham’s wealth, he now has to decide what to do. He moves into the region where the Abimelech rules, where Abraham had last gone during famine.

With God’s Commands (v.2)

Having made this move, he is met by God who gives him commands. Those commands are related to his present situation. Do not go down to Egypt. Live as a pilgrim here in this land. So Isaac has the challenges of life. He also has the clear commands of God as to what he is to do and not do.

With God’s Covenants (v.3-5)

Finally, God affirms His covenant with Isaac. God will keep His word to Abraham and has transferred the covenant to Isaac. Here we see the four major elements in this great covenant.

- God will bless Isaac and His people.
- God will give them all the land He has promised.
- God will give him descendents that cannot be counted.
- God will bless all the nations of the earth through him.

So he is to sojourn in the land of Abimelech with God’s precepts and promises. God’s precepts guide and guard his walk so that obedience is called for. God’s promises enable and encourage his walk so that he will delight in God and persevere.

This snapshot of Isaac’s life holds true for all of God’s people. It does for you as well. You have entered the promised land at your conversion for you are in the kingdom of God, the new realm where you are a new creature. But, this is not the new heavens and the new earth yet. We are still living in a fallen and futile world where there is disease, difficulty and decline. But, we have the clear Word of God as sufficient for our lives. We have His precepts for our duty and His promises for our delight. At the core of both is the promise of God’s presence with us. He is with us when we struggle with persecution and prosperity (Hebrews 13) and when we work hard to spread the good news to all the people groups (Matthew 28).
In our Problems

Key Verse:  

Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you (v.24)

Well, this all sounds so very good – but what about the real life you live where you sin and others sin against you? Once again, the core of faith is that we trust and do not tremble.

When Others Seem to Threaten

Isaac, as his father did before him, fears for his life. He believes he is in danger because of the beauty of his wife. So, following his father’s footsteps, he lies and says that Rebekah is his sister. Now, Abraham may have some excuse for saying this because Sarah was his half-sister. But Isaac has not such rationale. He simply falls back on a human strategy rather than resting on God’s promises.

Now this was not a momentary lapse that was soon corrected. Moses relates that they had been there a long time. Rebekah has at least not become a part of the king’s harem. However, they had become careless in maintaining their deceit. In fact, they were caught by the king himself. Do you sense the finger of God moving? Now look, the ESV is being bit coy here – Abimelech looked out and saw Isaac and Rebekah doing something that clearly indicated they were not just brother and sister. They were intimate.

So, Isaac is called to account. His explanation rings like Abraham’s did when he was caught. And once again, the pagan, Gentile king is the instrument in the humbling, convicting work of God. He recognizes that choices have consequences. I am sure that the history of Abraham is ringing in Abimelech’s heart. He knows that God will judge. There will be guilt and there will be consequences. So he publishes a protection order – no one is touch Isaac and Rebekah.

When Others are Jealous

God then blesses Isaac with a huge harvest. All that he touches turns to gold. In the environment of personal protection and God’s grand blessings, he becomes tremendously wealthy. Now this new wealth is in addition to what he had already acquired. Along with this prosperity comes enormous power.

But he is envied. The Philistines are jealous of all that he has. The king is afraid that he will exert his power, possibly to overthrow him. Isaac is now a threat; therefore the king takes direct measures. So, the man of God, experiencing the blessing of God even in his own failures, is now expelled from the land. Abimelech sees Isaac as threat. He demands that he leave even acknowledging that Isaac is the greater.

When Others Steal

When Isaac departs, he settles into the land of Gerar. It seems that he goes here because this is the land given to Abraham because of the wells he had dug. In violation of the covenant between Abraham and the Abimelech, the Philistines had stopped up those wells by filling them with dirt. Isaac now comes and re-digs those same wells again, finding water in them.
The Philistine shepherds declare that the wells are theirs. Now that the wells are unstopped and filled with water, they want them. They fight with Isaac’s shepherds over the wells. They are in fact, trying to steal them. They do not acknowledge the covenant that was made.

Now it is hard to tell whether Isaac is a godly peacemaker or a weak coward. When the Philistine shepherds pilfer his wells, he simply seems to move on. Is this “As much lies with you, live peaceably with all men?” Or is he simply a weak man, unable and unwilling to confront sin? The Bible at this point is not clear. It neither condemns nor condones his actions. He simply names the well so as to give it a lasting memory of being stolen. Then he moves on to dig another, only to have it happen all over again. Finally, he digs a well over which they do not fight. There, he names the well and praises God. He declares that God has made a place for them and they will be fruitful.

He journeys a bit further to a place later called Beersheba. Here, God meets him and speaks to him. God identifies Himself as the God of Abraham. But then look at what God says, “Fear not, for I am [present tense] with you and will bless you [future tense].” (v.24) God puts the finger on the problem in Isaac’s life during this time – he controlled by the fear of man.

You see, God had told him as he entered this place and time that God would be with him. God’s special covenant care would be his as he received the birthright from Abraham. Yet, he is afraid for his life, fearful of their threats and unwilling to confront their theft. Isaac has done what God said; he lived in the land and prospered. But he has not believed the promise of God in such a way that changes his heart. He is fearful.

Obeying the precepts of God are not enough. You must also rest in the promises of God. Faith is not equal to obedience. Faith is believing God, His precepts and promises, in such a way that you obey with courage, conviction and persistence. It is wonderful to see God here with Isaac, with Israel and her leaders and Jesus with His disciples encouraging them not to be fearful, but rather to be strong of good courage because God is with them.

So, what about you? Do you believe that God is with you, not just in His omnipresence, but in His special attending care? Does this change the way you respond to life’s problems? Do you tremble in circumstances or before people? Or do you rest with quiet confidence and persevering obedience? Sin teaches our hearts to fear; Scriptures teach our hearts to trust.
In our Promotions

Key Verse: *We see plainly that the Lord has been with you.* (v.28)

This is not the end of our story. What a grand thing it is when, even sometimes in our own failures, God is able to shine so brightly that others can’t help but see Him!

**Recognition of God’s Blessing**

Abimelech and Phicol come to meet with Isaac. Phicol is a chief of shepherds responsible for enforcing the grazing and well rights by military force (*The New Bible Commentary, Logos Edition*). Isaac is naturally suspicious. What more could they want now? They have expelled him from their lands. They had ruined and then robbed him of his wells. So what pain and trouble are they here to inflict?

Ah, but they are here humbled by the greatness of God for Isaac’s good. They have seen all that God has done for Isaac, in spite of Isaac’s disobedience and failure. They now have come to acknowledge that Isaac has the special attention and care of God. This is evidence in Isaac’s conduct over the wells and God’s great blessing of him. I love the way the ESV puts this, “We see plainly that the Lord has been with you.” (v.28)

What is striking here is that this text is in the immediate context of Esau rejecting his birthright. Abimelech and Phicol see what Esau does not. Esau has turned away from God’s covenant, God’s blessing, God’s promises and therefore God himself. Isaac is experiencing the blessing, public to unbelievers, which Esau has rejected. Moses puts this text here, not as an interlude or as an insertion, but to highlight the very great importance of God’s presence with His people in the covenant. You cannot despise the birthright and its covenant without despising the God of the birthright and His blessing. This is why Hebrews calls Esau, “profane”. Abimelech and Phicol may be Gentiles, but Esau is family. Yet, he is profane. He does not see or value what is plain to others.

What a great thing it is when, in the eyes of unbelievers, God’s people are clearly under the special care of God. They may be experiencing trials and difficulties. They may be experiencing great blessing and prosperity. But however God chooses to show Himself through His people, it is to bring honor and praise to Himself. In this vein, Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that it is not supernatural manifestations but rather the preaching of the Word exposing the hearts of unbelievers that causes them to fall down and acknowledge that God is surely there (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

**Relationship with God’s People**

For Isaac, this meant that conflict with his neighbors would cease. They make a treaty, secured with oaths and celebrated with a feast. The Philistine leadership has acknowledged God and established a relationship of peace with Isaac. But notice that it is still self-serving. Look carefully at what the declaration said: “So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.” (v.28-29,
ESV). Do you see it? They saw clearly that God was with Isaac and he was blessed by God. So, let’s get him to make an oath not to harm the Philistines and to declare that they had always treated him well, referring only to the events surround his wife. But they have totally ignored all their own sin against him in ignoring the covenant with Abraham, destroying and stealing what was not theirs. Unfortunately, this is often as it is. Unbelievers sometimes acknowledge God. But often it is for their own benefit to serve their own agendas, to attempt to shield themselves from the consequences of their sins. Do they clearly see God is with His people? Yes. Do they acknowledge it in self-serving ways? Yes. Be glad for the one and cautious over the other.

This then encourages us that the way we conduct ourselves in the presence of unbelievers may be a witness to them and bring them to peace with God. While we do not live as though unbelievers govern our conduct, our walk with God may well point them to the Lord. Paul says that putting others first becomes the light we hold out in darkness so that all may see the gospel in death and resurrection (Philippians 2).

So God is with us:

We have Jesus’ promise of His special presence till the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). So do not hesitate, doubt or despair. We serve the Lord until the kingdom fills all the earth and the King returns.

We have the promise of God’s special presence in care and sustenance as all we need (Hebrews 13:5-6). So in hardship, difficulty, personal sin, financial struggle, bodily illness we have all we need. In persecution, threats, being sinned against, we will not fear. We have God; that’s all we need.

What a dire thing it is when those who are familiar and family – those who are around Christian things all the time – despise and reject God by despising and rejecting the things of God. Now I am going to speak plainly to some of you and particularly some of our young people. Some of you are heading down Esau’s path. You are not recognizing the greatness of what God has given in the gospel and in this church fellowship. You are despising it and rejecting it. Careful, lest in turning away you are turning away from God.

What a delight when our walk with God and our engagement with the world around us bring people to acknowledge that God is with us. I know that this is what we all hunger and aim for. O that all over our neighborhoods and all through the nations, men and women, boys and girls will bow to Jesus having clearly seen that God is with us.
Deceitful Gain

Genesis 26:34-28:9

Introduction

There are two kinds of folly often emerging on the opposite ends of one’s life:

There is the folly of youth where disobedience, division and defiance lead to lifelong consequences.

There is the folly of old age where dullness, decline and self-focused serving erode the goodness and even the greatness of one’s life.

The text before us has these and other important themes that intertwine. This is much like life. Your life is not a single note being played. It is a whole symphony of instruments. Isaac, Rebekah, Esau and Jacob are all interacting with one another with heart issues, sinful behaviors, pulsing emotions all the while moving redemptive history forward.

I have chosen to look at a fairly large piece of text this morning that crosses chapter divisions. I am allowing Moses to tell me, through his own structure here, what is hanging together. He gives this text a clear structure. Then, inside that structure, he tells the story like a play. There are definite scenes here with the camera focused on someone and others moving on and off the stage.

So, what about the structure?

Disobedience - Esau’s Marriages
Denial - Isaac Intends to Bless Esau
Designs - Rebekah Plots for Jacob
Deceits - Jacob is Blessed
Distress - Esau is Blessed
Danger - Esau Plots against Jacob
Discharge - Isaac Intentionally Blesses Jacob
Defiance - Esau’s Marriages

So, the lights in the room are dimming. The music shifts to the title theme. The curtain begins to rise. The story unfolds. Will you see yourself on this stage?
Marriage - Opening and Closing Scenes
For the students of the Bible, note how Esau’s marriages are the opening and closing scenes. We sometimes refer to this as the “book ends”.

Disobedience – Marrying the Hittites (26:34-35)
He is willing, in spite of the example of his grandfather Abraham and the respect for the covenant, to marry women from the land of Canaan. They pleased Esau and suited him. These women were evidently wicked and troublesome. They brought great grief to Rebekah and Isaac.

Defiance – Marrying an Ishmaelite (28:6-9)
He is also defiant. The text here says that Esau noticed that Isaac disapproved of Canaanite women. He sees that Jacob is sent away (we’ll get to this part of story later – everyone here is being manipulated by Rebekah). So, instead of marrying Canaanite women, he marries an Ishmaelite woman. What makes him think this is any better? Here is an act of defiance – rather than seeking a wife among the family who might know God, he seeks a wife among the outcast family who had rejected God.

These serve two important purposes besides marking the text for us.
They illustrate the intentional, rebellious wickedness of Esau. Moses wants all to see that Esau is not a character to be sympathized with for losing his birthright. He is not just some jock who got taken by a sneaky schemer. He is disobedient and defiant.
They illuminate the weak, selfish, disobedience of Isaac. He is going to move into blessing Esau in spite of Esau’s character and conduct. He is going to transfer the covenant to a man who is profane, a man who has no respect or reverence for neither the covenant of God nor the God of the covenant.

Scene 1 – Isaac Intends to Bless Esau (v.1-4)
God’s people must be alert to the dangers of spiritual drift and decline in old age.

The scene opens with Isaac, old, blind reclining in his easy chair the darkness of his eyes betraying the darkness in his soul.

His Physical Decline
I can do no better than Kent Hughes eloquent description of the sad state Isaac is in.
… now as we continue the story of his life, years have passed, and he [Isaac] is quite old. And in the intervening decades something of Isaac’s spiritual edge has dulled. Creature comforts have become center-place for him as represented in his love for food. Early on there had been a hint of this when we read “Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game” (25:28). We get the sense that wild game and savory delights were laid out by his servants to ease his pampered stomach through the night. And as
he dreamed, his table was spread again with exotic dishes redolent with garnishes of leeks and onions — moist and succulent.

Aging had also left him visually impaired and dependent upon his family – and demanding. But most notably Isaac, notwithstanding his authentic faith, had come to oppose the revealed will of God regarding Jacob and Esau. He was well aware of the battle that had taken place between the twins in Rebekah’s womb. He knew that God had said, “The one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger” (25:23). Rebekah would not let him forget it. And the fact that Jacob had manipulated Esau to sell his birthright to him was a longstanding source of irritation to Isaac, and a subject of contention with his strong-willed wife. He was also painfully aware that Esau had married two Canaanite women — and that they had made life bitter for both him and Rebekah (cf. 26:34). But against the weight of all of this, Isaac was determined that though Esau had lost his birthright, he would now give him the firstborn’s blessing. Isaac adored his manly, hairy, red-bearded hunter son. Esau’s very smell intoxicated him. And dreams of a hunter’s feasts filled his vacant eyes. (Hughes, Genesis, p.347-348).

His loss of physical eyesight represents the loss of spiritual discernment.

His Personal Disobedience

This loss of spiritual discernment, connected with an idolatrous love of Esau and being mastered by his appetites, allows him to plan to bless Esau. Esau has already lost the birthright through his own folly. But Isaac sends Esau out to bring home the venison he loves so much. He wants, from the depths of his soul, to bless Esau. He will disobey God because of love gone idolatrous. This love for Esau is all entangled with his appetite for certain foods.

Listen to me – I want to say this with kindness and with Biblical firmness. You can and many do love their children too much. It is possible to love your children so much that they are idols. You will sin for love of them. You will want to control them, be their buddy, live your life through them. Danger! Danger! Danger! Idolatry and indulgence will dull your discernment and cause you disobey God.

Scene 2 – Rebekah Plots for Jacob (v.5-17)

God’s people must act with integrity and honesty particularly in the context of marriage.

The camera shifts to the adjoining room. There, beautiful Rebekah is listening with manipulative measures dancing in her heart.

Her Wicked Plan (v.5-10)

Now make no mistake here – Rebekah is not doing this in order to help God out or with an intent to fulfill God’s purpose. She knows what God has said. OK. But she loves Jacob with an idolatry that will begin to scheme a strategy to get what she wants for Jacob. It may be rightfully his both by God’s ordination and by Esau’s trade. But this is not the way to go about it.

So, here is her plan: “Go get a goat and bring it to me. I know Esau’s recipe. Your father is blind – he cannot see who it is who will give him the food. He will bless you.”
**His Hesitant Response**  (v.11-13)

But Jacob is no fool. He knows that he is nothing like Esau – in sound, skin or smell. His blind father has come to depend on his other senses which will give Jacob away. He well knows the wrath and curse that will fall if he is caught out. Why would Jacob say that Isaac would think he was being mocked? Surely because Jacob has, possibly even often, mocked him before.

But Rebekah has already anticipated this possibility. Without at this point divulging her full plan – which Jacob probably would have been revolted with – she sends him to do her bidding. Jacob, the schemer, has learned well from his conniving, manipulative mother.

**Their Terrible Fraud**  (v.14-17)

Rebekah prepares the terrible fraud. He brings the meat which she cooks. She gets Esau’s (presumably smelly) clothes. She has Jacob put on the clothes. She completes the costume by giving him a hairy feel on his exposed arms and neck. She takes the skin and silky hair of kid goats and fastens them on Jacob where Isaac would touch in a hug or kiss on the cheek. She hands him the platter of delicious food and warm bread. The lights fade out as “she pushes her ridiculously costumed favorite through the door” to her husband. (Hughes, p. 349)

**Scene 3 – Isaac Blesses his Sons**  (v.18-40)

_Sin and sinners do not frustrate the invincible purposes of God and even further them._

The lights come up once again on Isaac, the grand patriarch, waiting the arrival of a favored son with tasty venison. I can’t read this scene without thinking of those terrible scenes in _The Two Towers_ where Worm Tongue has the ear of the slowly failing and faltering king, the remnants of his former greatness hanging from him like useless skin.

**Jacob’s Deception**  (v.18-29)

Jacob’s sin against his father is described in painful detail. He lies about who he is. He enlists God as his accomplice when answering as to how he caught something so quickly. He allays the hesitations of his father. He serves him the meal and drink. How weak and pitiful Isaac is in his venial and idolatrous love. How cringing and hateful is Jacob’s deceit and lies. How cunning and crafty Rebekah is with heart beating fast hidden behind the door.

Isaac brings him close to be sure. Ah, the kiss of betrayal, familiar in the garden with a greater Isaac later. He smells the earth and believes the man of the earth is the son he holds. And Isaac is satisfied. He imparts the blessing. It is given here as a four stanza poem. In these, Isaac blesses Jacob with the birthright and the covenant standing.

In the blessing of heaven’s dew, this language lyrically expresses the fullness of all God’s favor as seen in the dew and harvest. It is the blessing of wealth and prosperity.
In the blessing of world rule, Isaac sees the covenant being fulfilled in the kingdom throughout all the earth. This is the blessing of power and rule.

In the blessing of familial homage, Jacob is made the head of the household. He is not only established in the line, but is elevated to its headship. This is the blessing of family leadership.

In the blessing and cursing, Isaac invokes the covenant of Abraham. He is here identifying Jacob as the one through whom the covenant will be carried on with all that it entailed. This is the blessing of covenantal union.

The blessing completed, Isaac hurries out with the footfalls of his brother just outside the tent.

**Esau’s Distress** (v.30-40)

Esau enters from his hunt with the food prepared. His heart is swelling as he prepares to receive the first-born blessing from his father. He sings out in greetings, the savory aromas drifting up from his tray.

But Isaac freezes. “Who is this?” And the deceit is uncovered. They know Isaac has been tricked. The blessing he had to give has already and irrevocably been given to Jacob. Esau bitterly invokes Jacob’s name as schemer and deceiver. But is there no blessing left for him? Jacob had stolen both the birthright and the blessing. What is for Esau, this favorite son? What blessing can be given where shoulders heave in grief and tears run?

Isaac invokes a blessing that is a prophecy. Here is the point of Moses’ giving this text. Esau’s descendents, the Edomites, were to live away from the Promised Land, the land of dew and fatness. They would become a restless and warlike people. But they would have rights to neither the covenant birthright nor blessing. This blessing is actually a curse.

Now, before we rise up in sympathetic dismay with Esau’s plight because of Jacob’s horrid deed, remember, he is a man who has despised his birthright and is attempting to get what is not his. If Jacob is a cheat, Esau is a thief. Now, Jacob’s sin is terrible. Rebekah’s planning and conniving is as well. But let’s recognize, as Hebrews does, this event is the end of a long trail of choices and consequences.

**Scene 4 – Jacob Flees Esau’s Anger** (27:41-28:5)

God uses the consequences of our sin to discipline, correct and change us.

The final scene is taken up with getting Jacob to safety.

**Rebekah Warns Him** (v.41-45)

Rebekah overhears Esau’s threats and realizes that he may well carry them out. He has the ability and evidently, the capacity. So she warns Jacob and prepares him to flee to Haran and take refuge with Laban, her brother (Jacob’s uncle).
Rebekah Protects Him (v.46)
In order to accomplish this, she goes to Isaac and pleads with him to send Jacob to Haran to find a wife. Esau’s wives have been a great grief to them. She claims to loathe her life because of these Hittite women. (I hear my daughter say all the time, “They will hate their life in the morning”, after watching OSU’s linebacker corps demolish a QB or running back). Her agenda is to protect Jacob. But she uses the situation, their own shared frustration over Esau’s wives, to manipulate Isaac into doing what she has already planned and prepared for Jacob to do.

Isaac Sends Him (28:1-5)
At Rebekah’s prompting, Isaac calls Jacob in and sends him to Haran, to live with Laban. There, he is to find a wife. He must not marry a Canaanite woman. He must not bring upon them all the grief Esau has. Wonder what Jacob is thinking while Isaac tells him this? One thing for certain – the natural bent of his heart towards deceit and scheming was deeply reinforced by his mother so that it became very difficult to change as he grew older.

So, Jacob leaves. Rebekah will summon him back when it is safe. What neither know is that he will spend 20 years away and Rebekah will never see him again. Choices have consequences. God works through our sin to carry out His plan. He also works out the consequences of our sins in order to do His transforming work.

Here are the principles that have emerged from this story:

**Lessons**

God’s people must be alert to the dangers of spiritual drift and decline in old age.

God’s people must act with integrity and honesty particularly in the context of marriage.

Sin and sinners do not frustrate the invincible purposes of God an even further them.

God uses the consequences of our sin to discipline, correct and change us.

What a sad and terrible story. No one here is worthy of admiration. No heroes; villains all. But yet the determinative plan of God moves forward. Through the very obstacles, God advances His irreversible and invincible purposes.

What a great warning and a great hope for us. We must pursue the ends God has revealed by the means God is pleased with. But even when we fail, He has gathered all that into His plan. Our God is in heaven; who can stay His Hand? None.
Introduction

We are an interesting lot. We can move so quickly from moments of faith and spiritual experience to words and deeds of folly and sin. Even at our best, our walk and worship is mingled and mangled. We all recognize this. We can stand in worship and sing the most God centered words and music. Then the person next to us isn’t controlling their child as they should and we will think the most awful thoughts. Our hearts can be swelling with gratitude towards God and almost immediately filled with anger towards our spouse.

Thoughtful Christians are never surprised and are always saddened by the remaining effects of sin. When indwelling sin rises its ugly head and tries to control, we sometimes despair. Regret ad self-loathing lurk around the fringes of our conscience. Heaven seems dim, holiness hard; God is frowning. We sometimes wonder why God would even bother with us. We are such worms.

But there are worms like us in the Bible. Jacob is one of them. Your Bible is opened to one of the 5 most famous stories in the Bible. It is included in every children’s Bible story book, coloring book and Sunday School materials. Yet, this is not just a children’s story. This is an important event in redemptive history. It is one of two major turning points in Jacob’s life. The Jacob-Laban narratives are book ended with Jacob’s two encounters with God. Both of these serve to show Jacob being transformed into a man of God.

The pattern of God’s interaction with His people is established in this text. Israel was to learn, in their place and time, how to be engaged with God. But this is not limited to Israel and the Old Covenant. It will be picked up later as coming to its grand fulfillment in Christ and therefore, through Him, for us.

An Act of Divine Grace (v.10-15)

Jacob is on his journey to Haran. This 550 mile journey probably would have taken almost a month. He has just been caught out in his deceit, bartered to get his birthright, connived to steal his blessing and sent away on the pretext of finding a wife in order to flee from his brother’s wrath. He is leaving his beloved mother whom he will never see again.

But even more than this, he is alienated from God. Everything to this point in the text indicates that Jacob has not yet had a personal encounter with God. He knows God has appeared to Abraham and to Isaac. He knows that the God of his fathers is the one and true God. But, he is living his life as his own god. The idols of his heart all clustered around his self-centeredness, rule and master him.

What we have here is a wandering, alienated, confused sinner trying to work through the consequences of his sin. On this night, God moves in an act of Divine grace.
Heaven and Earth Connected for His People (v.10-12)
What a hard place he has come to in his life. He is reduced to sleeping on the ground with a stone for a pillow. And he has a dream. In his dream he sees a ladder (or better, stairway) between heaven and earth. It is standing up in the earth and reaches up to heaven. It is wide and heavily trafficked by angels going up and down doing God’s bidding.

Why does God give him this particular dream?

It will clearly demonstrate that God is present and active in Jacob’s world and in his life. He sees that angelic servants are streaming up and down the stairway carrying out God’s bidding. Earth is full of God at work. Jacob must never forget that. He is not alone. God is present everywhere.

It will remind him of the rebellious attempt at Babel to erect a stairway to heaven. God stepped in back then to judge the builders and restrain further attempts. Through this, Jacob should see his own life and sin – God has stepped in to deal with him. This is not an act of punishment, but an act of grace. Unlike Babel God has put in place the only way to God.

It will become a motif through the Old Covenant so that when Jesus comes, He will be the one and only stairway to heaven. How can I say this? Look with me at John 1:51. Looking back on this story, Jesus connects this heavenward escalator with Himself. Nathaniel is a Jew with no guile or deceit, unlike Jacob. He truly acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah. Jesus is the stairway, the only one and true, stairway to heaven. If you want to have a relationship with God, Jesus is the only way. God has taken the initiative to provide the Way – through Christ alone.

God Revealing Himself to His People (v.13)
The focus of the dream is on the Lord. He stands above (or possibly, at the foot of) the stairway. Nevertheless, Moses turns the spotlight on God. God identifies Himself through His Names and through His relationships. He is the LORD, sovereign creator and sustainer. He is also the God of Abraham and Isaac. He stands over creation and angels, governing all. He engages people in relationship, graciously being their God.

He is a communicating God. He is not silent. He is not watching mechanistic wheels of law and choice roll on. He is the God who comes into the world He has made, discloses Himself to His people and speaks. He speaks here directly through a dream. He speaks at other times in the Old Covenant through prophets and psalmists. And then finally, he has spoken through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the final Word of God, the Logos.

Let us recognize the unique place this has in the Bible. Hebrews 1 tells us that up until God spoke with finality through His Son, He used various means to reveal Himself to the patriarchs and the prophets. So God has used dreams and visions in the Old Covenant to speak authoritatively to people. Now, God’s authoritative communication is exclusively in His Word. Peter can say in 1 Peter 1 that having the sure Word of God is more reliable than even their first-hand experience of the
Transfiguration. This being so, God has chosen now to speak authoritatively to His people through the Word of God. You have all you need to be pleasing to God in the bible. You do not need and should not pursue additional words from God. His will has been revealed. You are now to do that will and to walk in wisdom.

**God Promising Good to His People** *(v.13b-15)*

Imagine, here is the deceitful, conniving, stealing favored son and while he is reaping the consequences of his sin, God moves into his life. God does so, not in punishment, but in this marvelous act of grace.

He connects Jacob to the covenant and the promises God has made. God takes the initiative to assert and affirm that Jacob is the recipient and participant in the covenant. The covenant to Abraham and Isaac is confirmed to Jacob. The covenant includes the land and the people. The covenant also extends to the promise of a blessing through a descendent for all the people groups. The Abrahamic Covenant (Patriarchal Covenant) anticipates its fulfillment in Christ. Through the Lord Jesus, the blessing will not just be for physical descendents, but will also be extended to all the people groups.

God also promises to be with Jacob, to protect him and to provide him wherever he goes until he returns to the land *(v.15)*. God’s promise here is not simply an affirmation of His omnipresence, but is the assurance that Jacob is the special object of his attention and care. This grand promise we studied a couple of weeks ago – what an amazing thing it is that God makes this promise precisely when it seems His people are the least deserving.

That is why this section is an act of Divine grace. Jacob does not deserve the treatment he is getting. He deserves punishment. But God has chosen Jacob, has extended His love to him, brought him into the covenant and now revealing Himself to Jacob. This act of grace begins the transforming work in Jacob’s life. Repentance and growth and change will begin to mark this worm.

*God is always the initiator, by His grace, in engaging His people.*

**A Response of Humbled Repentance** *(v.16-19)*

How will a sinner like Jacob respond to such kindness in grace from God? What I see here is a response of humbled repentance.

**Experienced in the Fear of God** *(v.16-17)*

When Jacob awakens, he is aware that his own shortcoming and sinfulness *(v.16)*. God was here and he did not even know it. He is awakened from both physical and spiritual sleep. He is now aware of what he had been insensible to before. God is real. God is here. And that is the single most important fact of your existence. Are you aware of it?

Second, there is a holy fear or awe of God *(v.17a)*. The text says, “He was afraid.” Listen, when sinners are suddenly confronted with the awesome fact of God’s promises and presence, even in grace, there ought to be a response of awe and fear. When our giving the gospel produces primarily a man-centered, man-
pleasing, man-fulfilling response, we are not preaching Christ as we ought. God’s self-disclosure in your soul initially invokes fear not familiarity. The kindness of God in Christ should cast down our pride, strip us of our self-sufficiency, show us our utter sinfulness and wretchedness and bow us to God.

Expressed in the Sacrifice to God (v.18-19)

In the morning, Jacob arises and for the first time in the Biblical record, he worships God. His worship is in two common rites which he knows will please God.

He builds an altar. He takes the stone pillow and raises it up as a pillar of memorial. He is setting a marker at this place both geographically and personally. This is the place, in his travel and in his life, where he came to know God personally. Here is the place of faith for him. The pillar also serves as an altar. He apparently has no animal to sacrifice, so he pours oil over the top as a sacrifice. Israel knows that God is pleased with the sacrifices of oil. Later, they will learn that these aromatic sacrifices bring a smile of pleasure to the face of God.

He names the place. Here is the founding Bethel. This is the house of God. It is the house of God because it is gateway to heaven and the place where God is present and promises. Yes, it used to be called Luz. But now, it will, even to this day, be called Bethel.

Do you begin to see why Jesus alludes to this text and why John recorded it? John opens his gospel by asserting that God has disclosed Himself, in the midst of darkness, through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God with us. In His incarnation, we see God’s glory, full of grace and truth. Nathaniel is like Jesus, without deceit or guile. Nathaniel sees what every one is supposed to see: Jesus is the promised Redeemer, the fulfiller of all the Old Covenant and the stairway to heaven.

*God’s awakening our souls and becoming real to us causes us to bow in humble awe at His grace.*

A Promise of Grateful Worship (v.20-22)

First, we have to settle something: Is this an honorable vow or a dishonorable negotiation? Is Jacob attempting to manipulate God? Is he simply responding to God as a Benefactor, gratefully promising along the trajectory of God’s blessing?

This has been hard. My mentors see a meanness and conceited negotiation here. They see an attempt to manipulate God. I wonder. Yes, in fact, we all respond to God with self-interest. But hasn’t God designed us, not to serve that self-interest as an idol, but as a means to cause us to seek our greatest good in the best Benefactor? Isn’t this prayer and its promise simply Jacob engaged with God according to his light? How else will he know for certain that God is his God? Hasn’t God consistently asserted that His promises of His personal presence, provision and protection are how His people know He is their God? And what greater Bethel will there ever be for us than Jesus, our Bethel, in whom God is with us, near us and for us?

But then this so much sounds like Jacob is trying to establish the terms of his relationship with God. What God has promised, Jacob will turn into a way to manipulate
God. So can we believe what God has said and find our responses mingled with our own cravings and desires? All of us know deep in our souls this is true. We also know that there are religious groups that actually teach you to hold God accountable for what He has said. So often their praying sounds like Jacob here.

Jacob seems to be responding directly to what God has promised. He is responding to God’s promise with a vow of his own, each phrase in harmony with God’s revelation. But it is mingled with his own tendency to manipulate.

**In a Prayer of Dependence**

He begins with what I call a prayer of dependence. It recognizes that God must keep His Word or He is not God. God had promised to protect and provide. God had promised to be with him all the way till he returned. So, he expects that God will keep His Word and then the Lord will be Jacob’s God. It has the ring of God’s asserting that He is the God of Abraham and Isaac. Since He had covenanted with them and this identified Himself as their God, Jacob expects that God will identify Himself with Jacob through the keeping of the promises He has made.

He still seems to be finding it difficult to rise above his own worminess. The way this is phrased is a “if you will then I will”. Yes, it is based on what God has said and believes what God has said. But it still is an attempt to shift the initiative from God to Jacob. Jacob, even in this prayer of dependence, is attempting to become sovereign. God is the one who dictates the terms of our relationship with Him. He is the one who declares that He is our God. But we so want to be in control! We so want God to be at our call, to be the petitioner waiting for the sovereign choice of accepting Him.

The second part of this commitment shows the strength of his faith. He has already acknowledged that this is the house of God. He is not going back on that assertion, but is reinforcing it. This is the house of God. This will be known as the house of God, Bethel, if God keeps His promises. If this one claiming to be God does not keep His Word, then He is not God, this is not Bethel and our hope for the way to heaven is vain and false. His dream is just a nightmare.

But God will be true. God will keep His promises. He will protect and provide for Jacob. The assurance that God will keep His word anchors our hope in Christ. Listen to me – you are depending on the promise that if you will trust in Christ and bow to God, you will not die in your sins and you will be saved. If God has not kept His Word at any point, then how will you know that He will keep it for you over your salvation?

This is why Paul says that if the teaching about the resurrection is not true, then the whole thing is false, our hope is vain and our faith is empty. Jesus asserted his own death and resurrection. The apostles recorded it and taught it as the center of all redemption and history. If those sentences in this Book are not true, then we are doomed. It is all false and all folly.

But praise to God, it is all true. God kept His Word to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God’s Word in all that He has said and promised is true. Thus, Jesus is the one and only stairway to heaven. We can bank on Him. He will not fail us. He will be
our God and we His people. And there is no other way, no other name, no other salvation than the one by faith in Jesus Christ alone!

And happily, God is pleased to keep His Word even when we are trying to manipulate Him and grab for control. But let us be so very cautious – even when we are praying in faith, be alert to negotiating with God. May our praying not sound like this: God if you will do what you said then I will let you be my God, I will do this and that. In other words, don’t pray as though what God has said is actually in question. Pray with a heart totally submitted to God. In fact, pray like this: God, do for me what you promised and if you don’t now, I will trust you anyway.

**Respond to God’s promises with trust and faith, ever alert to tendencies to try to get our own way.**

**In a Commitment to Give**

Here the penniless man, depending on God, commits Himself to give back to God whatever God is pleased to bless him with. Here is the first use of the word *tithe* in the Bible. It is before the Law. It is a response to the grace of God. It is an expression of dependence on God and gratitude to God. There is no law to govern this response by Jacob. He promises to give because he has been humbled by the grace of God, blessed by the promises of God and is resting in the provision from God.

And so do we. Like Abraham with Melchizedek and Jacob here, we give, not in obedience to Law but as a response of love. We are guided by this proportion. But our response to the grace of God is a heart so full of gratitude that we, like the very poor church in the New Testament, begged for opportunity to give. As kindly as I can say this, when we get hung up on whether it is 10% or not, we have already missed the point. Freedom under grace ought to motivate us, not to give less, but to give more.

But, he doesn’t have it now, does he? All he has is a rock and some oil. But given the facts, believed by faith that God will protect and provide, he promises to give.

**Respond to the grace of God with acts of humble worship and grateful giving.**
Lessons

Remember these three important lessons for our lives.

**God is always the initiator, by His grace, in engaging His people.**

God’s awakening our souls and becoming real to us causes us to bow in humble awe at His grace.

**Respond to God’s promises with trust and faith, ever alert to tendencies to try to get our own way.**

**Respond to the grace of God with acts of humble worship and grateful giving.**

Let us thank God that He does not treat us according to our sins, but according to His grace. He has provided in Jesus the one and only way to Him. He has shown us these truths so as to awaken our souls and bring us to repentance.

Respond to the grace of God with holy awe and fear. We must both believe and bow. We must be humbled.

Respond to the grace of God with acts of God pleasing worship. Praise Him. Commit to Him. Depend on Him. Be willing to sacrifice all for the sake of His Name. In gratitude and with gladness, as you are able, give.

God is absolutely trustworthy. What He promises He will perform. What I observe is that many claim to trust Him for their salvation but do not trust Him for their daily living. This was not true for Jacob. He understood that it is all or nothing. So rest in Him. Trust Him. Believe Him. Bow to Him. And keep on till you wake in His presence, like our dear brother, Jim Feustel.
Getting What You Deserve

Genesis 29

Collaborative sermon preached by Dale Evans during Russ’s hospitalization.

So what will God’s provision and protection look like in Jacob’s life? If we were to trudge along the road with him as he traveled to Haran, what would Jacob expect? What would you encourage him to expect?

He, no doubt has much on his mind. He has left the land of God’s promise under less than ideal circumstances. He has been caught up in deceit and caught in his deception. He has caused his father great distress and his brother great desire for revenge. He is running not only for a wife, remember that is the stated context for his departure although we know more thanks to our narrator, but is also running for his life. Guilt and fear are tremendous burdens to bear. Often, just being relieved of these problems feels so good, that we fail to adequately deal with the issues that saddled us with them in the first place. I am certain that Jacob is still carrying this burden (we will be told so later in the upcoming narratives).

And then, Jacob just had this incredible vision of God’s wonder and glory as he, in spite of his sin, God has affirmed Jacob’s place in the covenantal blessing initially bestowed upon Abraham. God is with him, God is blessing him, God has plans and purposes for him, Jacob can probably not contain his emotion. He probably is very excited about what God is going to do for him next!

Well, the providential and invincible purposes of God are actually moving for our good and His glory, even when we are getting what we richly deserve!

In Willing Service to Others

Jacob travels on to Haran, arriving at the fields on the outskirts of the city.

Careful Confrontation of the Shepherds

God providence brings him to the place where the flocks are watered. There is a field and a well there. In a common practice to prevent the well from being contaminated, a large stone was laid on its top. When all the flocks and their shepherds had arrived, then they would take the stone off and bring the flocks to water drawn from the well.

Certainly this scene would have felt like what his mother would have told him about her situation so many years ago. He is in Haran. He is here to seek a wife. Here is a well. A scene like this has probably been played out day after day on the month long journey. And now it looks like it is unfolding before his very eyes.

So he asks the shepherds gathered near the well. Yes, they are from Haran. Yes, they know Laban and all is well with him. In fact, here comes his daughter, Rachel. Now, Jacob is a bit of a man about the world. He seems to be an experienced shepherd himself. He looks at his watch and realizes that these shepherds
are lolling about with their flocks at the wrong time of day. They ought to go water the sheep and put them out to pasture. “We don’t do it that way,” they reply. It strikes me that these men are here at this time waiting for Rachel to come to the well.

**Gallant Assistance for Rachel (v.9-12)**

While he is discussing this with them, Rachel arrives with her flock. When Jacob saw her and knew that she was the one the shepherds had identified, he leaps to her aid. He, by himself, rolls the stone off the wells. He draws the water and fills the troughs so that her entire flock can be watered. He is showing an honor and respect that the shepherds who were waiting on her seem to know little of. She is going to notice him.

Then, in typical near eastern fashion, he greets her with a kiss and weeps aloud. He has come to the end of his journey. Who would be at the destination but a relative of his uncle, Laban? When would he arrive at the destination but when she is coming out to water her flocks? Here is clearly the attending providence and provision of God. His weeping here is an expression of his great mingled emotions of gladness and relief. Then he identifies himself to her. She seems to drop everything and runs to tell her father.

**Glad Meeting with Laban (v.13-14)**

Laban is overjoyed to hear that a relative is in town. And a son of his sister, no less. He runs out to meet Jacob, gives him a welcoming greeting and brings him into his home. Jacob is seeing firsthand the attending hand of God. God is with him on the journey to Haran all the way into Laban’s home.

The Bible says that Jacob told Laban all these things. We don’t know exactly what that entails. It is possible that Jacob related with open honesty why he was here. He may have told the whole story. I am inclined in that direction because of how Laban responds. With words that evoke Adam’s seeing Eve for the first time, Laban says, “You are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” They are family that is all that matters.

But there is beginning an ominous note here as well. Moses is saying that Laban and Jacob are cut from the same cloth. They are related, yes. But they are also much alike in other, more foreboding ways.

As I read this, I am struck by how ordinary Jacob is, at some level. He is at times a gallant and manly in his way. He is at times, very culturally near eastern. He, for all his scheming and deceit, appears to be blind to Laban until it is too late. So he is not quite a smooth, sophisticated, sharp as he might want to appear.

Jacob also shows us how to move with joy in God’s providences. He seems to resonate with the God who is moving for him. He is willing to do hard work in the midst of what God is doing. He does not sit back and passively wait for God to do for him what he will not do for himself.

Here is a lesson for us as well. God has told you that He is actually engaged in your world. He is not distant or far. He is not standing in the wings, arms folded, waiting to see what will happen or what you will do. His messengers are moving to and fro
about the cosmos carrying out his bidding. And as the book of Hebrews reminds us, they are serving God’s purposes for His people. God is guiding and guarding your ways. You may plan, but God is directing the way those plans unfold. Jacob is surely imagining what arriving at Haran will be like with dreams of meeting his future wife. And then, here it is in Technicolor reality.

And so passes thirty happy days of life in Laban’s home.

**With Painfully Pointed Correction** *(v.15-30)*

We do not know all that transpired during that month. We do know for certain that Jacob began to love Rachel. We begin to see God’s painfully pointed hand of correction at work.

**In the Pursuit of Blessing** *(v.15-19)*

Jacob begins to live and work in Laban’s household. We can guess that this “man of the tent” knew a bit about tending sheep and about manipulating...I mean managing people. And Jacob likely worked hard, knowing that God was with him. He was eager to help at the well and probably was very efficient in his “duties” in Laban’s employ.

Laban recognized however that it was unfair to be the beneficiary of this quality labor without some form of payment and he offers Jacob whatever he would like. He probably envisioned a parcel of the family land, a small flock of sheep, a small some of money to relocate back in Canaan would be his replay. But Jacob had his eyes on Rachel from the moment he arrived. Rachel, yes Rachel as his wife would be his salary!

Laban agrees that this would be a reasonable request, especially in light of the price Jacob would pay. Seven productive years to trade as the dowry for his lovely younger daughter, Laban likely thought he was getting such a bargain!

But our narrator let’s us in on a bit of a problem, Rachel is one of two and indeed the younger! We should be primed and ready for the rest of the story as it unfolds.

**In the Reaping of Harvest** *(v.20-25)*

Picking up the story in verse 20 we expect to find a willing worker and a joyous wedding celebration. The anticipated parallel with Isaac and Rebekah cause us to expect a similar out come, but let’s see as we read on to verse 25.

What a turn of events for Jacob. Do you see the irony? Do you see the way that God has brought about a harvest of justice even in his gracious blessing? I don’t begin to think I understand how this could happen, even in an age before electric lights, but what a surprise!

**In the Mess of Complications** *(v.26-30)*

Jacob protested. “Foul!” He cried. “Not fair!” You can almost see him at the mouth of Laban’s tent stomping his feet and kicking the dirt. This is not the bargain that we established! You can almost hear him claim that Laban is a big liar and deceiver.
Then Laban speaks words that had to cut to the very heart of Jacob's protest if not his own emotional heart as well. “Leah is the firstborn.” Those words would have stung like a bee. Laban’s words could have just as well been spoken by God as well. The end does not justify the means.

But in this, Jacob was still willing to exchange another seven years to secure the privilege of having Rachel as his wife, but you can bet that all is not well yet.

Remember, those of you that have been worrying that Jacob seems to be skating by without any problem in this narrative, wham! God lets him have it...right where it counts so to speak. Do not feel sorry for Esau, he rejects God’s plans and purposes, but bear in mind even when we are knowing the recipients of God’s grace and mercy there still might be consequences to our sins and failures.

Here are our lessons from this narrative...

Let us first of all hear this lesson again. God is actually engaged in our world. He is not waiting to see what will happen or what you will do. Indeed we may plan, but God is directing the way those plans unfold. From the narratives of the Bible we learn how and why God works in these ways. The difference between them and us is not so much in the way God is working but in what we know about why God is acting in this way. We should trust God for his plan in our often complex and complicated lives.

Jacob worked hard when he thought that God was with him. And since we know that his is with us as well, we too should work hard in both understanding his character and will and in reflecting the glory of Christ who has perfectly gone before. He is with us always...in our mundane and normal just as he was with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And lastly, God is able to work out temporal retribution for our failures when he so desires. Let’s not fall into the trap where we think that just because all is well that we “got away” with whatever sin or problem you think you might be hiding. Or that God must not love your or care for you because in the working out of whatever situation you find yourself in God didn’t also eliminate the consequences. That is often how we judge God’s blessing. God was so good when “such and such a problem was resolved and I didn’t even have to _____!” You can fill in the blank. How often have we given or heard testimonies to that effect. And then on the flip side, become hardened, angry, bitter when God drags us through lessons of judgment and justice to change and soften our hearts. May we pray that God would soften our hearts to be receptive to accept his plan and work even harder, legitimately, for the prize that he has set before us.

The providential and invincible purposes of God are actually moving for our good and His glory, even when we are getting what we richly deserve!
Heart Idols in a Troubled Home
Genesis 29:31-30:24

Introduction
There is no greater temptation to the heart than to love, to want a good thing too much.

Think of things that are good that we all tend to love too much, to want at all costs. Think of the things that you feel like are needs, things you can’t live without.

What a raft of trouble and trial comes when we do not please God. The Bible narratives show us often the natural consequences and Divine chastening attendant to sinful and unwise living. It is power of the Bible stories. They ring true in the midst of the mess while existing as sign-posts to Christ and all that He is and offers for hope and help.

We have come this morning to a text that is both difficult to really grapple with and yet so plain in its trouble. How do we get here? Well, Jacob has married two women, one greatly loved and the other somewhat despised – what terrible heart trouble and strife this brings. It is all set up for us in verse 30 of Genesis 29. “He (Jacob) loved Rachel more than Leah and served Laban for 7 years for her.”

So, what is the point of this text? Leah is almost pathetic in her yearning for her husband’s love. Rachel is clearly a wife after Jacob’s own heart. Jacob appears to be willing to be intimate with a wife whom he does not seem to love yet over 7 years produces a child a year. When there ought to be great joy what we see are heart idols in a troubled home.

The Unloved Blessed by God (29:31-35)
The first four children are born with heart exposing sentences of pain and longing mingled with trust and praise.

Her Dependence upon God
Through this paragraph we see the Leah’s dependence upon God. She acknowledges that each son she bears comes from God. Her deep faith in God who loves her and blesses her causes her to walk in obedient worship. She responds to God as the giver of her blessings – He has taken notice of her (v.32) and has heard her (v.33). So she will praise Him (v.35).

We are encouraged then to be intentional in our dependence upon God. There is a kind of dependence that is forced upon us. God kicks all the slats out from us and we either hang on to Him or we sink. Too many Christians are quietly and simply self-reliant, depending on themselves. Maybe this is you. It takes major catastrophe to shake your self-confidence and self-reliance. Then you can look so spiritual when in the desperate times you cry out in private and public dependence.

But it is so much better for us to choose to recognize what is true all along anyway. Self-reliance is a mirage, a myth, an illusion. God desires and designs that
we be self-consciously dependent on Him at all times. This is a function of praying without ceasing. A heart that is dependent on God will send up sentences of prayer for grace, wisdom, insight, help and even love, praise and adoration.

And you ought to love it to be like this. It ought to thrill your heart to be utterly dependent upon God and to say so all the time. Then we will know that God takes notice, hears and moves on our behalf so that we will praise Him.

Her Progression of Sons

She is blessed as she produces a progression of sons. At the human level, this is a bit astonishing. She is Jacob’s wife. She is the first wife. She loves him and presents herself to him. We can wonder from our perspective about the why’s and what’s of their intimacy. Yet over 4 years, she becomes pregnant each year and gives birth to a son.

Israel’s familial and tribal lineage is being rehearsed here. The family squabbling and strife simply grows up over the centuries into tribal dissent and division. Yet God is pleased to bring into existence the first of His chosen people. From the progression of the first four sons of Leah come the prominent tribes. She brings forth Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. Later on, Levi will be chosen and set aside as the priests unto God. Judah will become the royal tribe from which Israel’s kings will descend and whose great end will be in Jesus Christ, the final King.

Her Expressions of Pain

The names she gives the sons speak of her pain. She is unloved (maybe even hated – see verse 31). She has become a wife through deceit. She was not the one who was loved, longed and labored for. She was the surprise the morning after. It is almost certain that she had little or no choice in the matter. She was eldest. She was to marry first. She was to do what her father said. Now she is in a marriage where her husband loves her not and her sister is the apple of his eye.

Listen to her longing in the boy’s names.

- **Reuben** She is experiencing affliction and longs for her husband’s love.
- **Simeon** She is experiencing hatred and rejection and knows God’s care.
- **Levi** She is experiencing loneliness and alienation and longs for her husband to be attached to her.
- **Judah** Now there is no complaint. Upon the birth of the son from whom future kings will come, there will be nothing but praise.

It would be easy to wonder about whether her desire to be loved by her husband has become an inordinate desire. I do not think anything in the text points us to that at this point. What we see seems to be more hope and longing mixed. Her husband is intimate with her. Out of that a son is born. Hopefully now he will see her value and treasure her, love her and become attached to her. But it was not to be.
This is often the way it is. You have a real and legitimate desire for what God commands someone else to give you. Maybe, it is the love and affection due a spouse. Maybe it is the rightful recognition due someone under your authority. But then they withhold it or even deny it. How will you respond? Will you crave it to the point you will sin to get it or sin when you don’t have it? Will you be content to continue to long for it, but stay submitted to the sweet and good providence of God?

Now, beloved, this is where our Christ-centered trajectory must be wise and Biblical. Leah shows us how God blesses us even when we are despised and rejected by people who ought to love us. Maslow and Dr. Phil are wrong – we do not have a need to be loved. We have a desire to be loved and in many, it is a craving. We have a responsibility to love, to love God and neighbor as we actually do love ourselves. Leah shows us how to be God dependent while rightly longing for the kindness and love of others.

Here is the lesson for the nation of Israel and for all of God’s people. We will often be hated and despised. Sometimes by people who ought to care for us. We cannot respond with bitterness and anger on the one hand nor self-pity and depression on the other. We can depend on God, know that He gives attention to our plight, hears our prayers and delights in our praise. And we may even experience unmeasured blessing and the sweetness of His care.

Yes, Jesus came to His own people, and they rejected Him, despised Him and finally crucified Him. But O, the progression of sons and daughters that have come out of His holy obedience even when it was painful, sad and hard.

**The Rivals Contending for Preeminence (30:1-18)**

How often it is hard enough without aggravating circumstances. So here, Leah is not only unloved by her husband, she is envied, taunted and finally humiliated by her sister. The contention and rivalry escalates. And blundering through all of this is weak, inept Jacob whose foolish love for Rachel binds him to her and blinds him to Leah.

**In the Use of their Handmaids**

O how envy and jealousy rules Rachel’s heart. She has the love and devotion of her husband. Yet her sister does not. She is jealous of her sister’s sons and the place they will now have. Without sons, her future is insecure. Jacob will pass on the complete inheritance to Leah’s sons. What will she have? Her sister has it all. What folly envy is! Its fierce gaze on what God has given others blinds you to what God has given you.

Rachel stands in stark contrast to her sister. Her desires become demands. You have to love the childish petulance of Rachel. “Give me children or I die.” What?!? She is going to threaten him? What is he supposed to do about it? To any thinking person it is obvious that the problem is Rachel, not Jacob. Leah has had no problem getting pregnant. But Rachel is barren. Leah is blessed by God. Rachel is barren by God.
Jacob well knows all this. He is not God nor is he in God’s place. He cannot cause what only God does. In his response is a rebuke, as well. God had withheld the fruit of her womb. So what is he supposed to do about it?

So Rachel proposes a family old solution – take my handmaid and we will have children by her. So Jacob fathers two boys, Dan and Naphtali, by Rachel’s handmaid. O, listen to the triumph in Rachel’s voice. She has competed with her sister and now has prevailed. She is so foolish. How can two boys fathered on her handmaid possibly be a triumph over a sister with four natural born sons?

Contrast the naming and statements of her two sons with that of Leah. In Dan she sees the reversal of the judgment of God. In Naphtali she has wrestled and overcome her sister. In neither of these is there real dependence on God nor the sense of presenting a gift to her husband. She has reversed God’s disfavor and scored points against her sister.

Meanwhile, Leah has stopped bearing children as well. The way this is stated implies that she is not having relations with Jacob and so is now having no children. She is not going to be outdone by her sister. If only she had been as content to wait on God for her rightful place over her sister as she was her rightful place in her husband’s heart. So, she offers her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob. She bears him two more boys, Gad and Asher. In her naming of them and her response to God’s giving of them, listen to her happiness. She is joyful and glad in her good fortune and in her public favor. She is happy for others will call her happy.

Can you see the difference? I am impressed by Leah – yes, there are things here to be concerned over. How many of you would come to the place that you will be glad in the favor of God even if you do not have the much sought after love in a relationship you prize?

**In the Trading of Favors**

Moses now writes to show the pettiness and pointlessness of their strife. Because we have monogamous marriages, what we read here is a bit mind-boggling. But listen for a moment to the story.

During the wheat harvest, Leah’s son Reuben found some man-drakes, a plant that was thought to be a fertility drug. It is referred to in the Song of Solomon as enhancing intimacy. Many also thought that it would help a barren woman conceive. So began a bizarre negotiation. Rachel wanted some of the man-drakes to help her infertility. Leah refuses. Her bitterness against Rachel is evident. “You took my husband; now I am supposed to help you have children with him?”

Rachel responds by offering to trade several nights with Jacob in return for the man-drakes. This confirms the implication earlier in the text that Leah has stopped bearing children because Jacob has stopped being intimate with her. Leah agrees to the trade. It seems that her heart has now begun to bow to an idol, the idol of her husband’s affection and attention.

So, she meets Jacob on the way home from harvest that evening. “You are mine tonight – I have hired you (dig at Jacob), paying by giving my son’s man-drakes (dig at Rachel and her barrenness). Jacob lies with her and she conceives a son.
God has dealt with her, given her due wages, for doubting Him and giving Jacob her handmaiden. So, Issachar is born and named.

Well, this is kind of sordid, isn’t it? Here is Israel with all their national prejudice and tribal pride hearing the inspired account of the travail and trouble by which they became a people. They should be humbled. They should be thankful that God designs the sad state of human relations and brings about His good and great purposes. We are not often far from this. We so rely on our ingenuity and strategy to get what we want. But how much better to trust, depend and wait on God. What an encouragement to know that even when we don’t, God is still at work to accomplish what He desires and designs.

The Births Concluding the Family  
(30:19-24)
The final two paragraphs bring the story to its climax.

In Leah’s Great Endowment  
(v.19-21)
God blesses her with a gift in this last son. Zebulun is born. This sixth son is a great gift from God. This word endowment implies not only a great and unexpected gift from God, but a rich blessing to be eagerly passed on.

Now, she hopes to be honored by her husband. This is now six sons she has borne him. Maybe now he will see her worth. Maybe now he will hold her up in honor. Six sons of her own she has brought him. Will he look to her now with affection and honor? Will he see her as blessed of God? Will he despise her still?

And she bore the first daughter in the family, Dinah. Sad to be a footnote, isn’t it?

In Rachel’s Lifted Reproach  
(v.22-24)
God lifts Rachel’s reproach. He takes notice of her and moves on her behalf. It is God’s mercy and grace, not plants and human ingenuity, which will make the barren ones rejoice as the mother of children. God had closed her womb. God opens her womb.

For the first time in this text, Rachel acknowledges with a true heart. God has taken her reproach away by giving her a son. She names him, Joseph. His name means, “May he add” but it sounds like, “Be taken away.” The irony of his naming and the history of his life – but that’s for another day.
This text ripples through the Bible in some unexpected ways. Moses preaching to Israel over 40-45 years later, warns Israel about the treatment of firstborn sons of unloved wives. Listen to Deuteronomy 21:15-17:

If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him children, and if the firstborn son belongs to the unloved, "then on the day when he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn, but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his."

So while Jacob may prefer Joseph because he loves Rachel, Reuben is the firstborn with all the rights and privileges that go with it. This sibling stuff is going to frame and fuel terrible sins by nearly everyone involved.

How do you respond when someone’s disobedience leaves you without?

**YOU CANNOT DEMAND WHAT OUGHT TO BE FREELY GIVEN.** Yes, you can ask. You ought to hope. You should pray much. You seek counsel to bear it well. You learn to be content by seeking your satisfaction in God alone. But your desires should not become demands.

**YOU OUGHT NOT DENY WHAT HAS BEEN GRACIOUSLY COMMANDED.** Jacob withheld what was commanded him to give – the affection and attention due his wife. It does not matter how the relationship began. It is still his responsibility to respond to God and reflect His love by loving her. You love by grace whom you ought.

**YOU MUST NOT ALLOW EVEN THE GOOD FROM GOD TO BE CRAVED** so much that you will sin to get or sin when you don’t have it. Yes, there are wrong desires. But I find people more often sin in an idolatrous craving for what is good and right.

My challenge to you? To most of you, this text sounds strange. To all of us, it should ring true. Join with me as we search our hearts and cry out to God, confessing our sin and longing to be holy before our great King. We must be satisfied and submitted, content and conquered by our Lord Jesus Christ.
Clever Sins
Genesis 30:25-31:16

Introduction

Clever is an interesting word. It can mean intelligent, bright, smart. To someone from New England, a clever person is easygoing, but not too bright but from the South they are just a pleasant person. But to the British, a clever person often should not be trusted – they tend to turn their cleverness against you. And a “clever move” to a Scotsman is commendable if it was a deceptive feint that got the soccer player around his defender and is contemptible of a person avoiding the intent of a contract.

So what are Laban and Jacob up to here? Are they being clever here – just smart and shrewd or are they making clever moves – underhanded, sneaky, without integrity?

God is at work to change the character and personality of Jacob. We cannot ever say, over the way we are in our attitudes and actions, “That is just the way I am.” Personality is not fixed. It is the current expression of habitual attitudes and actions molded by the past combined with whatever depravities we have inherited and graces God has bestowed. But by God’s grace, even our personalities can be changed into what is pleasing to God. Jacob is a sneaky, conniving, thieving, cruel and crafty in his character. From our introduction to him at his birth all the way through to the end of chapter 33, God is bringing ever increasing pressure to shatter and shape Jacob.

Yet, all along, God is also using each of these situations to fulfill His promises to Jacob. He has promised Him a people, a land and prosperity. So God is at work to both chasten and bless Jacob at the very same time through the very same circumstances. This is a great mercy for all of us – God is at work; He is at work to break us; He is at work to bless us – often all at the same time.
In Bargaining for Advantage (v.25-34)
Here are two powerful men, tribal chieftains related by marriage who now have to work out an exit strategy.

The Contract Fulfilled (v.25-26)
Jacob is seeking to leave and part from Laban amicably. He announces that he has kept their agreement and now wishes to leave with his wives and family. He has served out the 14 years in fulfillment of his agreement. Laban is being honored here as the titular clan leader. He wants to return to his own land and people, no disrespect intended.

As a side note, some Christians are misusing the Bible by taking narrative accounts like this and developing principles from them. We must distinguish between what is commanded and commended in the Bible, and what is the culture of the Bible. The Old Testament is full of this sort of clan, family clustered together living. This does not mean that clan living is the Biblical way. It does not mean that it is wrong (although, my observation of it in the Bible is that it is an opportunity and provocation of all sorts of family troubles). Just because Jacob lives in a tribal, clan style of culture does not mean that we ought to, as much as possible, live near and in close concert with our extended families. It does not mean that the living grandfathers oversee the sons and grandson’s families. The patriarchal clan system is culture, it is not Christian.

Why do I take the time to say this? There is a teaching going around now that is very popular in Christian circles. It is being taught as the Bible way and people doing it another way are sinning. This is the idea commonly called courtship. The strong advocates of courtship are taking the culture in which Christianity exists and turning it into Christianity. I am not saying courtship is wrong. But do not hold it up as some form of spiritually superior dating when in fact a great deal of it is actually medieval not Biblical. There are many things like this that we must be careful about. It may be a way of wisdom but it is not the revealed will of God.

It is clear that this desire to return is triggered by the birth of Joseph. Rachel now has her own son. Whatever was between Laban and Jacob, Joseph’s birth stirred Jacob to consider leaving and returning to his homeland. The text does not tell us clearly why this is so. From Jacob’s treatment of Joseph, effectively honoring him as the primary heir, it may be that Jacob was already thinking of him this way. Since he now had the heir he would really honor, he needs to establish that heir in the lands God has promised.

The Blessing Acknowledged (v.27-30)
Before Jacob came and was a part of Laban’s life and family, Laban was not a successful person, not prosperous. For all his knowing the value of everything and the worth of nothing, God had seen fit to not bless Laban with prosperity.

That all changed when Jacob entered the picture. Laban seems to understand this. Now, he may understand this just as an observation of reality. But he also knows,
because of divination or fortune-telling that it is God who is behind the blessing of being associated with Jacob. If Jacob leaves now, Laban may well see his fortunes decline and his prosperity wane.

Let’s think about this for a moment. Laban here is clearly a pagan, unbelieving man. He is involved with divination, a form of witchcraft. He seems to be attempting to ascertain whether his own gods or the God of Jacob is the best deity. If Jacob’s deity is causing the blessing of prosperity and Jacob is the mediator of that blessing, then Laban cannot afford to have Jacob move away. Laban’s involvement in witchcraft and idol worship has deeply affected his view of life and his children. We will find later that when Jacob does leave, Rachel steals the household gods.

Laban is a smart and shrewd man. He asks Jacob to name his wages (if he will stay) and promises to give them. He has had 14 years of service at the cost of two daughters. What now will Jacob ask as a wage? But Laban views his paying of the wage as a benefactor and giver. “I will give you your wages,” he says. Here is crafty man choosing his words carefully. Jacob can name his wages and even work for them. But Laban is not bound to pay what is earned, but rather what he chooses to give.

**The Agreement Struck**

Jacob has spent 14 years in the painful employ of this man. He knows that the bare words of the contract will be followed. He knows that the interpretation of the contract will be filled with assumptions and advantages for Laban. After all, he agreed to 7 years of labor for a wife – but Laban gave him Leah instead of Rachel. He is on guard. He hears wages and give – so, he counters.

Laban is not going to give him anything. He states clearly what his wages will be, how that will be identified and when they will be paid. His wages will be all the mottled (spotted and speckled) sheep and goats as well as the black lambs. He will go through the herds, cull out these sheep and incorporate them into his herd. He will then care for Laban’s flocks and herds.

Notice the phrasing in verse 33 [read the verse]. He is very concerned about Laban accusing him of theft. He makes it clear that in accepting his wages in this way, Laban can never accuse him of growing his flocks and herds by theft. The mottled animals will reproduce other mottled animals. I love the sort of jockeying and maneuvering of two crafty clever men seeking to gain an advantage and protect their interests. Each one thinks that he is out-smarting the other.

Laban agrees quickly. Now some speculate that he agreed because this looks like a great deal for him. These commentators say that the mottled sheep and goats would be of less value and the removing of them would reduce the future possibility of having these kinds of inferior animals. I think he agrees quickly because he has already observed a loop hole and has already planned what he actually does next.
In Maneuvering for Advantage (v.35-43)

What great and interesting drama the next few verses are! With an agreement in hand, Laban seeks to maneuver for advantage. In response, Jacob uses his superior knowledge and practice of husbandry to outwit and out maneuver Laban.

The Crafty Separation of the Herds (v.35-36)

What a sneaky thief Laban is. Before Jacob can cull out his wages, Laban removes all that would have been Jacob’s initially. You can almost see him walking slowly away from Jacob and then as soon as he is out of sight running to his herd, sons and herdsmen. He goes through the whole herd, identifies every one of the sheep and goats that would have been Jacob’s and separates them out from the herd. He is keeping the letter of the agreement. Jacob can have all those kinds of sheep at the time he goes through the herd. But, if those sheep and goats are not there then, well, he kept his end of the bargain. You should have thought of this, Jacob. You’re just not as smart as you think you are. Esau was an easy mark. Laban is not!

To shield them from Jacob, he divides his herd, giving Jacob’s portion to his sons thus excluding them from the count. In other words, these are no longer Laban’s sheep and goats. They are now his sons. They have already been given as an inheritance and thus are shielded from the agreement. To ensure this, he and this flock move to a standard, 3 days journey away. Thus he puts distance between Jacob and himself.

The Skillful Breeding of the Herds (v.37-43)

But this is not the end of the game. We are not told Jacob’s reaction to this. We just don’t know whether he was angry, feeling cheated. Was he grinning to himself because he anticipated something like this from Laban and had already made the plans he now put into play?

At any rate, Jacob is not going to be bested. He is, after all, a master herdsman under whose care Laban’s flocks and herds have prospered. So, he begins to implement a plan that was a mix of current folk lore and a profound understanding of animal breeding. Using the understanding he has and the skill he has developed over the years, he begins to breed Laban’s remaining flock under his care. The purpose here is twofold. He is seeking to breed multi-colored and black sheep and goats for his wages. He is also ensuring the vitality of his own flock and breeding in weakness into Laban’s.

The mechanism that Laban is recorded as using was and still is very much a part of husbandry folklore. Certainly, he later acknowledges that God was the invisible One working behind the scenes to actually cause the animals to give birth to multi-colored sheep and goats. He is using a visible mechanism, possibly because he believes there is a direct connection and possibly because he is providing a false mechanism that Laban may later emulate to little avail. The text makes a word play on the name Laban for as Jacob peeled back the bark on the sticks and exposed the white (lāḇān), he saw his flocks grow. He played the Laban game and won.
The second mechanism that Laban used is wise and skillful management of breeding. He ensures that the stronger animals are breeding for the variegated colors. He sets all the weaker animals in Laban’s flock and the stronger ones in his own. Over time this will strengthen his own flock and weaken Laban’s.

This is what is recorded in verse 43. Through his practical application of skill and knowledge to the problem at hand, his prosperity increases and becomes vast in his wealth. He not only increases his sheep and goats, but his whole standing as a tribal chieftain grows as he increases his servants and other herds as well.

**In Acknowledging God’s Intervention (31:1-16)**

The story takes an abrupt turn in verse 1 as God now moves to dislodge Jacob and actually send him back to his homeland.

**The Ruining of the Relationship (v.1-3)**

Laban’s sons begin to complain. They are jealous of his wealth. They seem to accuse him of acquiring what should have been theirs. They had originally stolen what was Jacob’s; now, they want to accuse him of stealing or at least diminishing their inheritance.

Jacob observes that Laban’s attitude toward him is changing as a result of their complaints. Laban has looked on Jacob with favor. You have to wonder if he views Jacob as something of a patsy, someone he can take advantage of, a ready mark for his schemes. Jacob has married both of his daughters, has produced 10 grandsons, has allowed himself to be duped out of his wages, has increased Laban’s flocks all the while possibly not realizing that the flock is growing in quantity but diminishing in quality. The boys, however, are starting to convince him. Furthermore, since he is a thief and since Jacob is increasing his own wealth on the back of Laban’s then he may well be turning against Jacob.

Then God steps in and settles the questions of staying or leaving. God instructs Jacob to return to his land and to his family. God has blessed him. Now God promises to be with him.

**The Rehearsal of God’s Favor (v.4-13)**

So Jacob gathers his family around to talk with them about what God is doing. He now divulges to his family why he has moved with such care and confidence in his dealings with Laban. All along, he has been in communion with and commanded by the Lord. When Laban tried to cheat him, God instructed him on what to do. We also find out that Laban had constantly been changing the agreement. Yet God helped Jacob at each point.

The Scriptures once again point us to a wonderful lesson. We plan, work hard, are involved in the routine work of what we ought to do. God gives wisdom all along the way, sometimes such that we prosper even while being taken advantage of. Behind all our labor is God’s work. Jacob was doing what he can and could. God was at work to do what Jacob cannot.

Finally, he rehearses the dream God gave him. The angel of the Lord comes to him and reminds him He is the God of Bethel, the house of God. He reminds him
of the sacrifice and honor he gave to God. God also reminds him that of the promise he made. Now, it is time to go home.

The Response of the Family (v.14-16)

Both Leah and Rachel respond well to the proposed move. Laban’s late actions have estranged them from him, eaten up their inheritance, enlarged their wealth in Jacob’s home – why stay here? God has spoken to Jacob, commanding him to return. So, when do we leave?

Here is a wonderful example of how to interact (rare as it may be in the Bible and certainly in this home.) The husband as leader of the home wants to please God and aims to walk in wisdom. He works hard trusting God to accomplish what is needed. He gathers his family and rehearses the faithfulness of God. He interprets what has happened through a God-centered lens. The wife (ves) see God at work, have an accurate and realistic view of what has happened and align their hearts to submit to their husband and obey God.

How do we grapple with this text in our world today?

GOD TAKES EVEN THE SINFUL SCHEMING OF MEN AND TURNS IT INTO GOOD. He designed and determined that the sins of Laban and Jacob would move redemptive history forward.

GOD IS AT WORK, DOING WHATEVER IT TAKES, TO MAKE YOU LIKE CHRIST. Romans 8:28-30 teaches us this great truth. Our souls will be deeply comforted if we will map this truth over every thing in our lives.

GOD WILL WORK THROUGH EVEN THE MOST DIFFICULT OF CIRCUMSTANCES TO GIVE WISDOM AND POWER TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT HE INTENDS. Often that wisdom uses our experience and ability in working out God’s will. But we depend on that wisdom and intentionally reach for it when we, in prayer, ask God for it in faith.

SOMETIMES WE ARE TOO CLEVER FOR OUR OWN GOOD. How often we are trying to avoid God’s providences or force our own plans. God will work through these clever schemes to bring us to see ourselves and to rely on Him.

DECEIT AND DISHONESTY CORRODE CHARACTER. For all of you who must engage the business world – hold fast to being honest in all your dealings.

CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE OPEN AND ABOVE BOARD IN THEIR DEALINGS while recognizing the value of skill and subtlety.

CHRIST STANDS IN STARK CONTRAST TO ALL THIS. His dealing with people was always open and transparent. The words of an agreement were not things used to maneuver for self-gain and advantage.

May we ever see God at work to make us like Christ and to reflect His glory.
The Trouble with In-Laws

Genesis 31:17-55

Introduction

Well none of you has trouble with in-laws, I am sure…

I have the perfect solution to in-law trouble – never allow them to meet. My father passed away before Esther and I met. When I went out to the Washington State to marry Esther, my mother was told not to travel due to her own mother’s imminent death. With Esther’s parents not traveling this way but once and that when my mom was in Germany and my mother never having traveled out there, my in-laws have never met. Yes, as unfathomable as it seems, my mother and Esther’s parents have never met one another.

So, not having very many in-law stories myself, I looked up in-laws on the web. Guess what, there is a website dedicated to Mother-in-Law stories. I read through some of them. Most are pathetic. Some are truly sad. Frankly, they end up as much being a reflection on weak, pampered mama’s boys as anything else. So, where are the father-in-law websites? Almost non-existent.

Yet, here, the in-law trouble is a father-in-law.

Some Background

Let’s get some background. Jacob has married two of the daughters of Laban. He has acquired great wealth and power, both in spite of the machinations of Laban and at his expense. He had respectfully asked to leave and go to his own homeland, having served out the required years for his wife. He has increased his wealth while keeping and breeding Laban’s flock. Now, the sons of Laban are jealous and are beginning to make trouble. Jacob has assembled his family out in the fields and flocks. There he has rehearsed the recent providences and larger promises of God. His family seems to be responding in faith and submission – it is time to go home (v.16).

God is pleased to glorify Himself by taking us through many kinds of hardships. Some those holiness making tools in God’s hands are called relatives. We will see that here in this chapter of Genesis. Much of this will ring (if we get the culture) with a certain amount of, “O, been there!!!” Most of you will recognize some of the trouble with in-laws.
A Secret Departure (v.17-21)
Now having his family’s agreement, Jacob begins the enormous job of preparing to move.

With Complete Household (v.17-18)
Jacob gathers up his entire household – his children, wives, servants and possessions. This is no small enterprise. It is a great tribe, vast herds, and a long and lumbering caravan.

With Aggravating Circumstances (v.19)
Two things aggravate the situation, make it worse.

HE LEFT WHEN LABAN WAS AWAY. It is clear that Jacob waited to do all this until Laban would not be at home. He does not want the face-to-face confrontation and the conflict that would almost certainly ensue. But, Laban is not going to take this kindly.

RACHEL STOLE HER FATHER’S IDOLS. This is the act of an unbeliever. This is someone at least trusting in a charm while preparing to depart from home to the unknown. Or it may well be full-blown idolatry and she wants her household gods to accompany her.

Both of these provoke Laban and fuel his anger and launch pursuit.

With Misdirecting Actions (v.20-21)
The word “tricked” here also occurs in verses 26-27. It means to misdirect or to steal the heart. Moses is using the word intentionally here and in Laban’s later accusation to remind us that Jacob is still the trickster. It is God’s accurate interpretation of Jacob’s attitude and action.

An Immediate Pursuit (v.22-24)
Laban learns three days later that Jacob and his family are all gone. It is described by the word, “flee”.

With Dangerous Intent (v.22-23)
He gathers up his kinsman and takes out in hot pursuit of Jacob. Jacob has a three day head start. It takes seven days for him to catch up to Jacob. Moses records this in a way that sets the stage for what follows. The galloping pursuers are described as kinsman, not as an army which they actually probably were. They are described as pursuing and closing with Jacob. So it may not be an army but this military language.

With Divine Warning (v.24)
Laban’s dangerous intent becomes clearer as God warns him. Possibly on the night they camped within hailing distance, God comes to him in a dream and speaks to him. God warns Laban not to so much as to speak badly to Jacob, much less harm him.
An Outraged Confrontation (v.25-42)
Talk about in-law trouble. I doubt seriously any of you have had your father-in-law gather the clan and hunt you down over a seven day trek. Here are two powerful and prosperous tribal chieftains facing each other down. Here is a cunning and deeply self-deceived father-in-law preparing to attempt to humiliate his son-in-law.

With Manipulative Attacks (v.25-30)
Laban begins to attack Jacob verbally, trying to manipulate the situation. He tries to play the wounded and offended parent. “Why would Jacob steal his daughters and grand-children away? Why sneak them off? Why rob Laban of the opportunity to have a party and send them off with appropriate affection and attention? What kind of low, family denying, in-law disrespecting person are you? If it hadn’t been for God’s warning, I would punish you. After all, I could hurt you.”

Listen to the sarcastic attack on Jacob’s character. “You say you long for your family (this is how you treat family) and what you really did was steal my gods.” Laban is putting Jacob on the defensive. He is accusing him of things he does not know are true. What in any of Laban’s experience with Jacob would make him think that JACOB would steal his stupid idols?

Moses’ writing here is so interesting. God is quietly at work. Don’t you think that the manipulative accusation still touches a sore spot? Jacob well knows that this is the way he treats family, even his own. He was quite willing to deceive his father and steal from his brother, then run in order to gain what was not his.

Also, what kind of gods are they that allow themselves to captured, stolen and snuck away? All through this account there is irony, if not sarcasm, dripped on these idols, these so-called gods.

With Righteous Indignation (v.31-32)
Jacob is not going to be cowed by this sort of harsh and intimidating attack. He simply states what he knows (and Laban well knows, since he is here, seven days later with an “army”) that Laban would not have allowed Jacob to leave. Verses 43-44 will tell us why this is true. Laban has not, does not and his descendents will not, honor the intent nor the words of a contract. Jacob was fairly certain that he was not going to be sent off to his homeland with rejoicing and fond farewells. So, with good reason, he has not acted foolishly, but wisely.

Jacob is so sure that no one in his camp would steal the idols that he says that they will execute the thief. This is huge. If Laban can find anything that is his in Jacob’s camp, then he can take it. What he doesn’t know is that Rachel, his own heart idol, is herself a god-thief.

With Fruitless Searching (v.33-35)
Thus is launched a long and tedious search. The order in which the tents are searched is illuminating of Laban’s mind. He searches Jacob’s. He searches Leah’s. He searches their servant’s tents. He finally goes to Rachel’s tent.

Well, here we have the thief. She has taken them and hid them in her camel saddle. These saddles are more like chairs than our western saddles. So they often
had elaborate cloths draped on them and pockets to hold and carry things in them. It was quite common to take them into the tents as something to sit on there.

She has learned her father’s craft and manipulation well. She is sitting on this camel saddle with the gods hidden in it. She basically says, “Please excuse my not moving. I am in my time of month.” It takes a stronger and more wily man than Laban to challenge a married daughter who is having her period. So, he never found the purloined idols.

**With Angry Accusations**

Now Jacob responds with understandably angry accusations. Here is Laban, patiently a conniving con man, accusing him of a theft he did not commit and implying more, that he has taken the daughters and children wrongly. His wounded indignation here is palatable. “Where is the offense? Where is the sin? What have you found that was yours? Bring forth the proof of your accusations? You think my wives are still yours? You want to try to claim my children? What sheep and goat do you see in my flocks that are not mine? What servant here bears your brand? Come on, bring it out. Put it down here between us. Let others observe and judge!” Jacob may have done much wrong to Esau, but he is innocent when it comes to Laban.

Not only has he not wronged Laban, but he has oft been sinned against by Laban. Now he enumerates and illustrates the long list of grievances he has against his father-in-law. For twenty years he has suffered at the conniving, deceiving hands of this man. Through it all, he has kept the flocks with consummate skill – no miscarriages. He has never fed himself from Laban’s flock, a reasonable practice and wage for the day. Unlike all other shepherds, he has taken personal responsibility for defensive failure – he has always voluntarily borne the cost of loss from the flock by wild animals. He has replaced stolen animals, whether they were stolen by day or night. He has done so because Laban has demanded it. He has endlessly, tirelessly and personally looked to the good of Laban’s flocks and herds. He fulfilled his agreement, serving the full fourteen years for his wives. Ten times Laban had broken their contract by changing the wages. These are all verifiable and attested by everyone standing around. How dare Laban accuse him of stealing a couple of worthless pieces of wood or rock!

O, but he was not alone in this long, twenty year struggle. He acknowledges what God had promised when he fled from home: God was with Him. This was not just God’s omnipresence. God attending care was with Him so that he has all this wealth he has now, in spite of all that Laban could do. He also acknowledges the special care of God in the midst of affliction. God had provided and prospered. And now, under threat from Laban, God had directly and personally intervened on Jacob’s behalf. What Laban has heard as a warning Jacob describes as a rebuke. Jacob has it right. There is a distinct, “Laban, you had better not accuse or judge, much less attack or destroy Jacob. You are the one at fault here.”
A Resolving Covenant (v.43-55)

There has to be resolution of this conflict. It cannot go on. It has reached a crescendo. Laban’s false accusations against Jacob and Jacob’s righteous grievances against Laban have both men in each others faces, the veins in their neck’s bulging.

With Dishonest Assertions (v.43-44)

Laban’s next sentence is astounding in it its hubris. “These are my daughters; these are my (grand)children; these are my flocks; everything here is mine – but there is nothing I can do about it. You’re going to take them. I have to give them up. So, what can I do? I can make you a promise.”

In the tradition they both understood, Jacob took a stone and set it on end as a pillar to mark the occasion and the content of what was about to be promised. They gathered stones into a pile known as a memorial stile. They sat down to eat a covenant meal. Then each in their respective languages, Laban in Aramaic and Jacob in Hebrew, call the place “The Heap of Memorial.”

With Family Threats (v.45-50)

But Laban is not finished. He turns the covenant into a threat. “I promise you that if you abuse by daughters or take more wives, then I call on God to deal with you.” Ok, at one level these are his daughters, grandchildren and, well, used to be, flocks. But NOT ANY MORE! This is nothing but a final threat, a final attempt to make himself look good as the defender of his family. He is still trying to intimidate Jacob. And he is attempting to use God as his stick. So, build this covenant cairn, this heap of stones and call God as witness to and make Jacob understand exactly what Laban is threatening.

With Territorial Promises (v.51-54)

In these verses, Laban and Jacob establish a border, a boundary between them. They mutually promise not to cross over this border with the intent to do harm. Probably both of them are thinking, “Do not cross this border again. You stay out of my lands and I will stay out of yours, you meddlesome, troublesome man.”

So Laban and Jacob agree and enter this covenant. Laban invokes God by His patriarchal relationships from which he is distant. Jacob invokes the awesome and fearful name of God with which he is personally familiar and moved by. He sacrifices to God and feasts with his family. God has been good. His integrity has been upheld; his father-in-law subdued; his God is pleased.

With Peaceful Departure (v.55)

Just a final, brief word. Laban says good bye, kissing the daughters and children. The Bible says that he blessed them. We don’t know what that blessing was. Then he leaves and goes home. The conflict is over. But…
As we conclude, I am going to focus on help for in-law trouble. Now, I am aware that some of you are single and don’t have in-laws… yet. I know there are several families here where there are parents and sons and daughters as in-laws. Out of this narrative, we can address challenges and issues in our relationships with extended family.

**CORE PRINCIPLE:** Stop trying to solve in-law issues as a natural family and deal with them as a spiritual family.

### For Parents as In-Laws

**BE GOVERNED BY THE SCRIPTURES IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH IN-LAWS AND SONS/DAUGHTERS.** You must believe and bow to the Scripture as defining, determining and directing how you engage one another as in-laws.

**RECOGNIZE THEIR HOME AS AN INDEPENDENT SPHERE OF AUTHORITY.** Primary to this is acknowledging the headship of the man in his home.

**GIVE UP THE DESIRE FOR CONTROL.** For many parents, control is a difficult issue. You seek to extend the control you had over your kids into the new home. It is particularly difficult when they want to do things differently.

**BE POISED TO OFFER WISE AND BIBLICAL COUNSEL.** Learn how to take the Scriptures, apply them from the lessons in your own life and give counsel in a way that invites being accepted.

**DO NOT USE YOUR STATION IN LIFE TO MANIPULATE AND GAIN WHAT YOU WANT.** Do not use your status as grandparents, your money, anything about this place as – in-laws to shame your sons or daughters into what you want and crave.

**DO NOT COMPETE WITH THE OTHER IN-LAWS FOR TIME, ATTENTION, ETC.** Prefer one another, be willing to give up your perceived rights when it comes to holidays, vacations, over-nighters, etc.

### For Sons and Daughters as In-Laws

**BE GOVERNED BY THE SCRIPTURES IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH IN-LAWS AND PARENTS.** You must believe and bow to the Scripture as defining, determining and directing how you engage one another as in-laws.

**BE ONE WITH YOUR SPOUSE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO YOUR IN-LAWS.** Implement the *leave and cleave* principle of the Bible. Where there are issues, the husband should lead and command with the wife counseling and following.

**KEEP CHRIST AND THE CHURCH COMMUNITY AS THE CENTER OF YOUR HOME.** Help your parents and in-laws to have a Bible centered view of life and ministry. Keep the Lord’s Day for the Lord – it is not family day.

**BE POISED TO ACCEPT THEIR WISE COUNSEL.** Humbly receive, weigh and follow wise counsel. Be able to discern the difference between counsel and command.

Finally, as much as lies in you, live at peace with all men, including, for the glory of God, your in-laws.
Facing Up To Consequences
Genesis 32-33

Dan Turner, Russ Kennedy

Introduction

Facing up to consequences God’s way will be both painful and pleasing. There is hope for anyone here this morning who needs to reconcile; both to God and with others. Reconciliation is a work of grace to be sought by faith and acknowledged in praise. This is what we are about to hear. (Pray)

Fearing the Consequences of our Sins

Genesis 32:1-21

Knowing what he has done to Esau, Jacob is afraid that his sins are coming home to roost – that Esau is out for revenge. He desires to obey the LORD and return to the Promised Land. Yet he realizes that a greater conflict awaits him. How the Lord provides and protects when meeting an enemy of our own making is what these next two chapters are about. When we fear the consequences of our sins what are some tendencies we might employ that are not motivated by faith? When the Lord has you face up to a relationship you have damaged, what do you do? Where is God when we lean upon our own understanding for how to reconcile with one we sinned against?

In the Presence of God (v.1-2)

Our passage for today is Genesis chapters 32-33. Follow along with me as begin reading this text by reading 32:1-2.

Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them he said, “This is God’s camp!” So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

Jacob has made his break with Laban. He has left the world of scheming and its values behind. He has set his face resolutely toward the Promised Land, toward the place of God's presence. Jacob is responding to the Lord’s command to “arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred” (31:13). But as his eyes and feet turn again to the Promised Land, he realizes that a greater conflict awaits him; a conflict of his own doing. Jacob fears the consequences of his own sins.

On his way toward the land of promise, he is met by angels of God. Like Bethel in Chapter 28, God is with Jacob. This quite brief yet significant introduction to these two chapters tells us something about God. We see angels or messengers of God. The Lord, prior to Jacob facing the consequences of his sins, communicates that He is present. And this revealing of heavenly beings was interpreted by Jacob in a specific way. Notice what Jacob says in response to this revelation. “This is God’s camp”. Whatever Jacob saw he explained as “the camp of God”.

This term appears to mean “an army camp” (Ross; p.541). Since the parallel with Bethel in 28:16-17 is definite, we are led to conclude that this army of God is a
friendly army. God is with; not against Jacob. Jacob is entering not just the Promised Land. Jacob enters God’s encampment in which his army of angels had set up their base of operation. The point is clear. Jacob can take comfort from the revelation. Faith not fear is to shape his choices and actions as he faces his own consequences with Esau. Knowledge of His presence, knowledge of His power, and knowledge of His protection are to reassure and reinforce us as we face crises even of our own doing. (cf. Ps.34:7).

In the Plea to Esau (v.3-8)
This topic of fearing the consequences of sin is made clear as we move through the story. Follow along as we pick up the story starting at verse 3.

And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, “Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, “I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight”. And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to our brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him.” Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels into two camps, thinking, “If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape”.

We must keep in mind that the imminent crisis approaching Jacob is his own doing. Recall back to chapter 27 and how Jacob manipulated the birth right out from under his brother 20 years ago. When he left town Esau was plotting to kill him. Now he is faced with the consequences of his sin. Notice how his apprehension gave way to decisions that were not shaped by the reality of vv.1-2. Jacob sent his own messengers and told them exactly what to say. We are to understand that though there is a level of trust in the Lord, Jacob at present is not operating by faith. A low level yet strong concern for his safety controlled his actions. By calling himself Esau’s servant (in v. 4) and providing all these gifts, Jacob is trying to achieve reconciliation; not by God’s way but by his own way. He was trying to buy Esau off in order to achieve a level of peace.

In the Prayer to God (v.9-12)
Our faith is much like Jacob’s. We hear the great redemptive stories of the Bible. We see and memorize precious promises of God. We believe…and then we face intimidating circumstances. We lean on our own ways to make things happen.

Do not try to bribe people so as to live at peace with those you have hurt. Reconciliation is not a work of man but the work of God. Though Jacob’s fear and guilt demonstrates a lack of faith, he is a believer. He knows the covenant God has made to Abraham and Isaac. He knows that the LORD has been faithful to His promises and that he has been a recipient of the LORD’s steadfast love. And as a result of this belief he prays. This is a classic model of praying for help. Picking up in verse nine we read…

And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, “Return to our country and to your kindred, that I may do
you good, I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, “I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude”.

Here in this section Jacob demonstrates what we all are to do when thinking about the consequences of our own sin and how to reconcile with the one we hurt. HE PRAYS. Here we have preserved for us a great prayer after which we are to pattern our own prayers.

Now what struck me as I was meditating on this passage was Jacob’s motivation for doing certain things. At times we see him motivated by faith and grace as is reflected in this prayer. But just prior to this prayer we see him motivated by fear and guilt. When I look at this passage, I look in a mirror. When I have damaged a relationship and the consequences are looming, I can waver in fear and guilt trying to patch the relationship through manipulation and well-crafted strategies. And then, I can fall to my knees and pray a biblically sound prayer with passion and faith. Oh, what a mixture believers are. But oh, what a faithful God He is!

When we waffle under fear and guilt over facing the circumstances of our own sins we will try to deliver ourselves out of the mess rather than rely upon the Lord. This is made clear as we listen to vv.13-21.

**In the Plans for Morning (v.13-21)**

So he stayed there that night and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove. “He instructed thee first, “When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, “To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?” then you shall say, “They belong to our servant Jacob. The yare a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.” He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, “You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, and you shall say, “Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us” For he thought, “I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me”. So the present passed on ahead of him and he himself stayed that night in the camp.

The first major section of this text closes by Jacob’s needless efforts to deliver himself from Esau. The lessons for God’s people are clear. Our sins hurt people. Hurt people can become angry. Our responsibility is to try to reconcile with those we’ve sinned against. God’s people can pray with confidence for help in this process. God’s people should rely upon His faithfulness to give courage and compassion in order to reach out to enemies of our own making. It is self-
centered unbelief when we try to deliver ourselves from our self-made difficult circumstances. Our confidence must be in Christ who provided forgiveness for all these sins as He bled and died on the cross. Our confidence must be in the risen Christ who reigns on high as our high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses. Our confidence must be “that He who began a good work will complete it” no matter what threats come into view. Our confidence in Him must yield our obedience to Him.

**Submitting to the Conquering of our Sovereign**

*Genesis 32:22-32*

What do we need to respond like that? Picking up the narrative in vv.22 we see Jacob trying to protect his family but is met by God who dramatically and decisively confronts Jacob. Follow along as I read vv.22-32.

*The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me. And he said to him, “What is your name? And he said, “Jacob”. Then he said “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed”. Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face and yet my life has been delivered”*. The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip on the sinew of the thigh.

Here in this section we see the Lord confronting, changing and crippling Jacob. Here we see how the LORD changes a self-satisfied, self-dependent person into a God-satisfied, God-dependent person.

**Confronted by the Lord**

*(v.22-25)*

Notice with me in vv.22-25 how Jacob was confronted by the Lord. Verse 22 summarizes the crossing of the Jabbok. The following vv. describe the actual crossing.

Jacob sent his entire family across the Jabbok at night leaving him alone; alone to face a man; a man whose identity was veiled by the darkness, a man who was unable to defeat Jacob until he did something extraordinary, a man who positioned Jacob for a blessing by breaking him. Before Jacob can enter the Promised Land; before he can successfully face the one he sinned against, he needed to be broken. And broken he was!
Changed by the Lord (v.26-29)

In vv.26-29, this blessing was given to Jacob because Jacob was changed. No longer will he be a misleading man. He will be a forthright follower of God. And this blessing is expressed in a changed name. “What is your name”? was asked of Jacob. In telling his name he must own up to his nature. “Jacob” means “a con artist who catches and trips up people in order to get what he wants”. By telling the man his name he confesses his sinful nature. And he needed to do this before he could enjoy the blessing.

Verse 28 gives us insight into this mysterious attacker. He says, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel...”. The renaming of Jacob demonstrates this man’s authority. He gave Jacob a new life, a new status, a new identity! The name Israel means “He strives with God, or “God fights”. This new name was given as a way to remember this event. When Moses wrote this book for the Israelites moving toward the Promised Land, God’s people needed to remember that “when we strive with God, God strives with us and wins”. Assailed by the LORD is the blessing itself. But this blessing comes with a price.

Crippled by the Lord (v.30-32)

Vv.30-32 tell us of this price. Jacob names the place “Peniel” which means “I have seen God face to face and yet my life has been delivered”. This event was shocking for Jacob. Nobody could see God face to face and live (cf. Ex.19:21; 33:18ff). And yet, he did. By the authority of the unknown assailant, Jacob receives new life.

Seeking the Correction for our Resolution

As a result of the decisive work of God, Jacob now humbles himself, and goes ahead of his family to seek reconciliation with his brother. This whole Jacob-Esau cycle starting in chapter 25 and ending here in chapter 33 is fascinating. On the one hand, we see God’s faithfulness. We see the Lord’s pursuing, intrusive and relentless love over Jacob. We see what the Lord will do in order to reposition his people to receive a blessing. He will pursue, overwhelm, shatter if must and then remake his people to carry out His plan. God frequently accomplished his plan in spite of the efforts of Jacob.

And on the other hand we see Jacob; a man of grace and faith mingled with guilt and fear. He was broken by God’s power, he saw the glory of God’s face and yet he still struggles with indwelling sin. Get the point of all this beloved: God is able to bring about reconciliation even though we our faith might be small and weak.

Jacob’s Humble Approach (v.1-3)

We notice this first in Jacob’s humble approach in vv.1-3.

And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He
herself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times until he came near to his brother.

Hobbling and humbled Jacob approaches his brother whom he has not seen for 20 years.

Jacob exhibits humility and desire as he comes out to meet his brother. Jacob demonstrates the effect of God’s relentless love; limping but desiring to obey Jacob strives for reconciliation.

But Jacob is not faultless. Bowing 7 times – was that necessary? Giving all these gifts – does he need to do this to achieve reconciliation? This narrative portrays the reconciliation of the brothers as an answer to Jacob’s prayer back in 32:11. This is all about the Lord changing hearts and changing lives. Reconciliation was God’s way of saving Jacob from the wrath of Esau. We can see this in vv.4-14.

Esau’s Surprising Grace

But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept. And when Esau lifted up his eyes and was the women and children, he said, “The children who God has graciously given your servant.” Then the servants drew near, they and their children and bowed down. Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near and they bowed down. Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company that I met?” Jacob answered “To find favor in the sight of my lord.” But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother, keep what you have for yourself”. Jacob said, “No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing he face of God and you have accepted me. Please accept my blessing that is brought to you because God had dealt graciously with me and because I have enough”. Thus he urged him and he took it.

Isn’t it noticeable that the change in Esau is the result of the work of God; not an effect from Jacob’s gift. Notice the motivation at first for Jacob giving gifts to Esau. You can see this in v.8 Esau asks Jacob for and explanation for his actions. And Jacob says, “To find favor...”. That is why I’m giving you gifts; trying to purchase grace.

Now notice in v.11 why Jacob gives gifts to Esau. “...if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present”. The point of the shift from “to find favor” to “have found favor” is to highlight the fact that Jacob has already received Esau’s favor or forgiveness. This came not as a result of anything Jacob did. Grace graced Esau and Jacob was a recipient of the work of God. Now the gift is a token of appreciation; not a purchase of reconciliation.

God’s Enduring Name

The narrative comes to a close in vv.15-20; a narrative about how God gives grace to face our own troublesome circumstances and in spite of us works out reconciliation. It is fitting to end the story and end the message with God’s enduring name; for this text is all about Him.
Whatever guilty fears Jacob had, whatever anxiety he experienced, however fretful he was, because of the Lord we see him worshipping at the end. He did this by setting up an alter to God and calling it El-Elohe-Israel. The name designated the power and fidelity of God and his promise-fulfilling activities. God never lies. God cannot be stopped. God’s purposes will be successful! Reconciliation is a work of the LORD; not the efforts of man.

As one commentator well said, “Those who have received God’s grace (deliverance at Peniel and bounty of possessions) may be confident of God’s promise of protection when they seek reconciliation with others. RECONCILIATION IS A WORK OF GRACE, TO BE SOUGHT BY FAITH AND ACKNOWLEDGED IN PRAISE (A. Ross, p.567. quoted also in the introduction of this message).

To the praise of the God of Israel; the almighty God (i.e. El), the Strong One, the Sturdy One, the Committed One to His promises (see Gen.32:11 – “deliver me from the hand of my brother”); praise be to Him.

Lessons

To bring this message to a close some lessons are offered.

*Often at the center of our fears, anxieties and worries are concerns over the consequences of our sins.* When our eyes are off the LORD and onto our own strategies, we will do almost anything to get out of the personal and at times painful work of face to face reconciliation. When our sin has hurt someone, let us have concerns not over the consequences of our sins but over the Lord’s reputation and over the well-being of the offended.

*God may shatter us and He will always shape us – He is at work in His person and providence to radically change us.* Beloved, let us not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. Let us not be weary when reproved by Him. The Lord disciplines the one he loves. He is treating us as sons and daughters – even when it is unbearably hard. Trust in his love. Trust in his care. Trust that He knows what we need in order to receive what He offers.

*We must seek the will of God and wisdom of God to deal with the results of our sins in a way that pleases Him.* The tendency when facing the consequences of our sin is to attempt to deliver ourselves from it. Resist the temptation! Make it your aim to be pleasing to Him in working through your consequences of sin. Rely upon the One who makes reconciliation. Rest not in your own devises. And remember that the Bible says, “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift (Matt.5:23f)

*Our character is not perfected so as to show the power of indwelling sin and our daily need for the Savior.* Like Jacob, we are a mixture of faithfulness and faithlessness. We trust in Him and then trust in ourselves. How necessary, then, is it that pastor Russ preaches the book of Genesis week after week. We must hear that we have been freed from sin and raised with Christ. And that this world has nothing to offer us. We need to hear this week after week because we are fickle and will be tempted by the world and attracted to that which is passing away. We will be dazzled by that
which cannot protect. We will be allured to our own gifts and strategies. Don’t forsake coming together and humbly submitting to the Word preached.

The full and forever blessing is to see the face of God and live. This is why Jacob calls the blessed and decisive work of God Peniel “face of God”. If Jacob rejoiced at this, how much more shall we? We have our Peniel, our Face of God, in Christ. And it is so much clearer than what Jacob saw that dim morning before the dawn. In Christ we have the blazing light of the glory of God in the face of Christ. In Christ we have been reconciled to the Holy One. In Christ, we need not fear looking at the face of God. In Christ, seek His face. In Christ, anticipate His smile of acceptance. Even when we are working through the consequences of our sin, the face of Christ is our hope, our joy, our life! Do you know Him like this? When you think of actually seeing the face of God, how does your heart respond? Dread or Delight? Praise or Panic?

Exhortations

If we leave a message like this without being reconciled to God through Christ we’ve missed the point altogether.

Go people – be reconciled to God

- Talk to Him about your sin
- Turn away from your sin
- Trust in His provision for your sin (the death and resurrection of Christ)
- Treasure His faithfulness & face
- Treat the Church as the place to marvel at the glory of God in the face of Christ.

If we leave a message like this without empowerment to go and be reconciled to an offended brother or sister, we’ve missed the effects of “seeing the face of God in Christ”.

Go people – be reconciled to the one you’ve hurt

- Talk about your sin to the one you offended
- Turn the conversation toward asking for forgiveness
- Take responsibility for making things right
- Trust the Lord that he will give you the grace to do all this
- Treasure your relationships; don’t discard them
- Treat the Church as a place where reconciled relationships can occur and be enjoyed
Many of us are familiar with the great story by Alexander Dumas titled, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The novel is about Edmond Dantes, whose success earns him three conspiring enemies. They write a letter falsely incriminating him in a revolutionary plot. These three enemies are Danglars, Fernand Mondego, and Caderousse. Danglars will become captain of the Pharaon once Dantes is removed, Fernand aspires to win Mercedes' love, and Caderousse is a jealous neighbor of Dantes. The denunciation fallen into the hands of the public prosecutor, Monsieur de Villefort. He has Dantes incarcerated as a most dangerous criminal, throwing him into the Chateau D'Iff. After 14 years, Dantes escapes from prison through a series of events that bring him to know one, Abbe Faria, who teaches Dantes all his vast knowledge of literature, the sciences and languages and the location of an immense treasure on the Isle of Monte Cristo. When the Abbe dies, Dantes replaces his body with the Abbe's.

Dantes' only reason for living now is to have vengeance upon those who threw his life away. These men deserve to suffer. Their downfall shall be all the more destructive if his revenge is not brash, but calculated. Over the next ten years, Monte Cristo retrieves the treasure, conditions himself, and learns all about his enemies. Then he begins to exact revenge. He believes his duty to act as divine justice. So, he reenters Parisien society and playing on each man’s weakness, he systematically exposes, destroys or kills each one. Thus, the Count's revenge is now complete. He has succeeded in his quest for slow revenge. His enemies have suffered for their sins. He had assumed the role of Providence by destroying all that had been built by his enemies during his long years of imprisonment. Dumas is intent on drawing us in to root on the hero until we see the dire effects, the dust and ashes left after the burning fire of vengeance. Here was a man who had been terribly sinned against whose cause was even just. But the sweetness of each act of revenge began to sour in his mouth and left him weary and smitten in conscience.

Sometimes our own lives are like this. We are a people who have been sinned against, sometimes as children and often as adults. Many of you have been abused as children, taken advantage of as teens or sinned against at home, at work, at school. Some of us have even experienced being sinned against by Christian peers or leaders. We may have played out scenes of justice or even revenge in our heads, long tasty scripts of setting things right or getting even that lie in our hearts like dark and destructive tales. And maybe some of you have acted on those thoughts.

The Bible was written for our illustration and our instruction. You do not experience life in a way that is unique to you alone. The Bible is full of people who have been sinned against in horrible ways. The Bible is full of right and wrong responses to those terrible deeds.
We are faced here with a tangled web of sin, weakness, unbridled anger, deception and vengeance. These intermingled issues make a difficult situation impossible. This is one of two texts in this portion of Genesis whose purpose is difficult. It seems to be a break in the flow of the text, an interlude. But, if we are guided by Moses’ developing purpose and themes rather than being tied to a structure, I think we can see what we are to learn.

At the heart of Genesis 34 is grave problem with exacting vengeance.

A Wicked Defilement (v.1-12)

After reconciling with Esau, Jacob and his clan settle into the land. They are consolidating their wealth and establishing themselves on their own land. Jacob has purchased the land from Hamor and seems to be dwelling in peaceful coexistence (33:19). While this might not appear to be significant, God had told them to go on to Bethel and settle there. The consequences of settling here are going to be very severe.

Its Terrible Cause (v.1-4)

Dinah is where she ought not be. She is associating with the Canaanite women. She has gone out to see them. She seems to be curious. But the Canaanite women were wicked and immoral. All through the Old Testament, we find warning after warning against these women. But they captivate her. So she may not mean harm – she may be being drawn. But her action is unwise, even if her intent is innocent.

She goes to see and there she is seen. Shechem, the son of Hamor and the prince of the ruling tribe of the area sees her. Shechem lusts after her. In his lust, he forces her and rapes her. There is no question of it being forced. And he has humiliated her. Having debased her and violated her, she now has little hope of a good marriage.

However, in a not unusual turn, his heart softens toward her and he falls in love with her. Moses does not seem to question the authenticity of his love for her. The parallelism here is significant. He now speaks tenderly to her, wooing her and wanting to marry her.

One Hebrew scholar notes that Moses presents the three main sets of verbs in opposition to one another:

- He took lay defiled
- He clave loved spoke kindly

Thus, the first set of verbs serve to highlight the wickedness of Shechem and justify the anger of Jacob’s sons. The second set serve to soften the harshness and hardness, the “grimness” of the crime. It is seeming to say that Shechem acted out of a wild consuming love. [cited in Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, p.573]
Its Weak Response (v.5-7)
The report of this assault comes to Jacob. Jacob’s response to the rape of his daughter is indifference. He learned of it and since the kids are not around, he made no effort challenge nor charge Shechem with the crime.

When Jacob’s sons arrive from the field having heard of what happened, they are incensed. Initially they have a righteous anger. This ought not to have been done. It is a wicked thing. They are angry at her being defiled. They are going to seek justice. Maybe Dinah should not have been where she was; but Shechem’s crime is inexcusable.

Moses is also highlighting the bland, weak response of Jacob. He is not acting with godly patient wisdom. He is acting with cowardly weak indecision. He may not really even care. After all, Dinah is the daughter of Leah. One wonders if his reaction would have been different if she had been Rachel’s daughter. His indifference and lack of righteous indignation arise from his heart, from the what he believes and what he wants. He is not going to raise a fuss. He wants peace. Dinah is not prized. So, Jacob is not seeking justice. The effect is that in the absence of leading his sons well to seek what is right, he leaves them without direction and they move from seeking justice to seeking vengeance.

Its Proposed Solution (v.8-12)
Jacob is approached with a proposal for marriage. Now, imagine your response to a young, rich son of the most powerful person in your community who has forced your daughter and now father and son are proposing a marriage. Yet, in this text, Jacob does not even respond – it is his sons who will speak up.

Hamor proposes a union in marriage that will affect a union of families (v.8-10). He is proposing intermarriage, land-sharing and commerce. Rather than being two tribes headed toward possible contention over this terrible event, he is seeking to unite the tribes through marriages so that they will become one. He makes his appeal aiming at Jacob’s desire for prosperity and for peace.

Shechem also proposes marriage (v.11-12). He is seeking to make amends, gain favor through paying whatever bride price Jacob wants to set. It was (and still is in many cultures) a custom that the father of the bride was paid a bride price. Usually it was negotiated based on the ability of the groom to pay. However, a father could declare the great value he set on his daughter by the price he set. Here Shechem is willing to pay almost anything to marry Dinah. Wonder what Jacob thought – Moses does not record his response.

God’s people are being warned of the grave dangers and enticing temptations when we mingle with pagans in a wrong way. Jacob’s settling down in the midst of this pagan land in disobedience to God exposed his family to pagan influence and personal failure. Dinah’s fascination with the Canaanite women exposed her to the defiling lust of a pagan young man. In the absence of decisive and righteous leadership, the boys who are late teenagers and early twenty-somethings, allow their anger to control them and drive them in vicious violence.
Israel must be alert to danger the Canaanite pagans pose as they enter the land. We must be alert to defilement in our interaction with the pagan culture around us. We do not live in a Christian society – outside of the church, even moral people are still pagan by Biblical standards. Let us be oh so cautious as we live among the world that we do not become like the world even as we seek to win the world.

**A Treacherous Deceit (v.13-24)**

In the absence of a clear and decisive answer from Jacob, his sons enter the negotiation and launch a treacherous deceit.

**Its Cunning Proposal (v.13-17)**

Moses portrays this as a cunning proposal. It was deceit from the beginning. We do not know at this point the extent of the plan. We do know that they took advantage of the situation. With cunning and devious intent, they make a counter proposal. If Hamor and his clan want to be united with Jacob and his clan, then all of the males must be circumcised. If they are willing to do this, then the deal can go forward. If not, they will leave and take Dinah with them, the deal is off.

This betrays a deep lack of respect for spiritual things. The rite of circumcision was certainly the mark of being a son of Abraham. It was how one identified oneself or ones male children in the tribal lineage. They are basically calling on Hamor and his clan to be absorbed into Jacob’s. Being circumcised would not mark the merging of the clans, but rather the absorption of one by the other. But, they had no intention of keeping the promise. They were willing to take this rite, invested by God with sacred meaning, and use it to serve their vengeful agenda. Like Jacob in his youth, these sons of the schemer are themselves disregarding what is holy and scheming for their own ends.

**Its Dishonest Presentation (v.18-24)**

Jacob’s sons are not the only deceivers in this proposal. Hamor and Shechem have their own agenda. What is not clear is whether the arguments presented to the men of their city and clan represent their true agenda or they are making a dishonest presentation. It seems to me that, both are true. Their true agenda is to gain control of Jacob’s people and prosperity. The only way to get the clan to go along will be to dangle that as an incentive. Moses is showing these pagan men, even when they accept the rite of circumcision, to be acting in their own interests, not serving God’s interests. Thus, no descendent of Hamor nor any Canaanite can point back to this agreement and their accepting circumcision to make a claim to either protection or provision as Israel moves in conquest.

O Shechem is ready to move now. He delights in Dinah. He has great standing with the people. He is respected and admired. So, he and his father go to the gate of the city where they convene a meeting of the men of the city. There they make their presentation. Their arguments are heart exposing while being deceiving at the same time. Here are the arguments:
We are living at peace together now – so unification is possible and desirable. The land here is large enough and fruitful enough for us all – so there will be no trouble with sharing the resources.

We will become the owners of all they have if this marriage takes place. But, there is a condition – every male has to be circumcised or they are not going to agree to the marriage. I am trying to imagine being Joe Smith in Hamor’s clan being told that if I, as an adult male, will be circumcised then his son can marry this woman, unite the tribes and make me wealthy. Do I believe this? Do I think this is worth it? It may be a measure of the wickedness of these pagans that they would consider this for what it will gain them.

Moses records that all the males who “went through the gate” were circumcised. This means that not only the inhabitants of the city itself, but its surrounding suburbs and farms as well as outlying villages doing trading in the city. Every able bodies man was taken, circumcised and laid up for a period of healing.

**A Vengeful Destruction** (v.25-31)

Now the plans the brothers had hatched wrecks a vengeful and violent destruction.

**Its Terrible Slaughter** (v.25-29)

On the third day, when Hamor’s clan would be sorest and weakest, Dinah’s two oldest brothers, Simeon and Levi, attack the city. They slaughter Hamor, Shechem and all the men. They took the city, capturing all the women and children. They seized all their livestock and harvest. They totally plundered the land. Everything was taken. Nothing was left. In their own eyes, this vengeance was warranted and just for Shechem had “defiled their sister.”

Then, in one short phrase, a stunning surprise awaits the reader. They “took Dinah out of Shechem’s house and went away.” (v.26). Is this what you would expect? Dinah has, all along, been kept in Shechem’s home! This negotiation has not been taking place with Dinah safely secured in her own tent with Jacob’s clan. Now, we have to surmise then that she was being held not at her own will. Does this not explain her brother’s a bit more? Does it not make Jacob’s silence all the more appalling?

Is their response a righteous application of justice or a vicious application of vengeance? If Shechem had been the only one to die, I believe this would have been justice. But they have wiped out a whole tribe’s males. They have done so through a deceit and without regard to their participation. Certainly, Moses implies that the men of the city approved of Shechem’s actions, both by entering the agreement and by the high regard in which they held him even after his crime.

Further, the justice of God is not exercised through deceit and manipulation. Vengeance is an ugly master that will bring any excuse and rationale to serve its terrible purposes.
Its Troubling Responses (v.30-31)

Now Jacob speaks. Imagine that! He does not intervene or speak up in behalf of his daughter, but he condemns the sons for their actions? Should he have? Yes, certainly. But notice why he does so – not because their actions were wrong, but because of the consequences their actions may possibly bring. The phrasing is interesting here, “You have made me a stink to my neighbors.” He is concerned about the opinion of the pagans and the possible destruction by them.

Brothers and sisters, not if God’s promises are true. Yes, he may be a stink for neither acting in justice nor restraining his sons’ vengeance. But he cannot and will not be destroyed. He is the son of promise and the father of the promised. This is doubt and possibly denial of God’s promises and purposes.

Look at their accusation, “Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?” This accusing sword is two-edged. Should Hamor and Shechem get away with treating Dinah like a whore? No. And here is the second cut, why are you, Jacob, treating her like someone to be bought and sold to secure your place? Doesn’t that just make you a pimp? Your own daughter?

But make no mistake, God is still at work.

The Canaanites are exposed as the pagans they really are. Sometimes God allows wicked people to act in visibly wicked ways so that we will have no choice but to have a Biblical assessment.

Jacob’s disobedience, his weak and indecisive leadership and possibly an uncaring heart, are exposed. The results are devastating in his family. Where a mature and God-pleasing justice ought to govern, fear, weakness and craving for peace wrought havoc.

The Israelites learn a great lesson. While the pagans around them may commit terrible crimes, even in sinning against one of their own, they are not free to act any way they choose. God will eventually authorize the kind of destruction of the Canaanites that Simeon and Levi had wrought, but not yet.
Lessons

So this brings me to challenge you in several ways.

*WE ARE TOO COZY WITH THE WORLD AROUND US.* Because we view our neighbors as cultured, kind, helpful, useful people – yes, they are lost, but – we sometimes are blurring the line between believer and unbeliever. That coziness on our part as parents and grandparents sometimes leads to curiosity and fascination in our sons and daughters with terribly dangerous consequences. We are to win the lost to Christ – we not to lose ourselves to the lost.

*IN THE MIDST OF BEING SINNED AGAINST, WE MUST NOT SEEK VENGEANCE.* Most of what you face is personal and individual being sinned against. It may even be of the class of crime and sin as against Dinah. God has provided the means of justice. If that means of justice, the government we are under fails, then we must not seek vengeance. We must commit ourselves to the long-term justice of God – a justice that will eventually mete out God’s punishment. Leave room for that.

*WE NEED HUMBLE, STRONG, DECISIVE, CHRIST-LIKE, GOD-FEARING, RIGHTEOUS, BIBLE BELIEVING AND OBEYING LEADERSHIP.* I am deeply concerned that Christian leadership has gone down slope two ways: (1) we are so insipid, weak and spineless that we will even allow the core doctrines and holiness of the church to be compromised with little real reaction; or (2) we are so domineering, dictatorial, unkind and un-Christlike that we lose our sense of humble, servant-like, measured leadership and the core doctrines and holiness of the church are diminished, disdained and denied.

*Cling to Christ whose love for us and treasuring of us always causes Him to support us, defend us and honor us.* We must rest in the reassurance that His own faithfulness and favor are us, His bride, His beloved.
The Problem of Vengeance
Genesis 34
Introduction

Sometimes, life is difficult to understand. We are faced with baffling perplexities of natural disasters, depraved crimes, or unreasonable people. The responses of people to the tsunami in Sri Lanka and Hurricane Katrina have reflected the general perplexity and anger that comes when life is difficult, dangerous, and destructive. People’s explanations and interpretations leave them struggling.

Sometimes, the Christian’s life is even more difficult. What we are sometimes taught from the Bible shapes present expectations that clash terribly with present realities. God promises to provide all your needs including the grace to give but you can’t even pay your bills. God promises long life and health to people who honor parents but your godly sister dies early. God promises to heal His people, but you have a debilitating disease. God is merciful and loving, yet life is hard and horrible.

These are very difficult tensions. We have them – the question is, how do we deal with them?

So what’s up here in Genesis? How are these two chapters going to help us?

Moses is ending the generations of Isaac section which is primarily about Jacob and Esau. While Jacob will appear again at the end of the Genesis, here is where his story primarily ends. From here on out, instead of being a main character, he is moved to a supporting role (and not an admirable at that.) But as life winds down for these two brothers, their experience of life at that point is instructive for all. Moses is recording this history with a for God’s people intent.

For Israel they saw Jacob with all the blessings of God still not receiving the fullness of God’s promises. They also saw the greatness of Esau and the rise of Edom as a nation with the questions and tensions that created.

For us there are all the practical tensions we live with. Some are matters of sin. Some are matters of the suffering of living in a fallen world. Some are perplexities where there are tensions between what God has promised and our experiences of His present providences.

How does a text like this help us deal with life’s difficult tensions? Let’s give it our attention and see what God will do.
The Mingled Experience of the Righteous

Jacob experiences obedience and the blessing of God mingled with sorrow and failure.

The Sweetness of Obedience and Blessing (35:1-15)

The weak indecisive leader of Genesis 34 stirs himself up to obey God when God speaks. The danger his sons have placed him in dislodges him from where he has settled. Now, he is to return to the place where he met with God before, the place called Bethel, the house of God.

The Blessing of Purity (v.1-4)

Jacob’s first act of decisive obedience is to command a single minded worship of God. He ordered the gathering up of all the idols collected and carried while in his journeying. Surely this is pointedly aimed at Rachel, the darling of his heart. But there seems to have been much idolatry that had infected his household.

In the rituals of changing their clothes, purifying (washing) themselves and taking away their earrings, he is showing a reverence for God and repentance towards God. Here is a distinct putting off of the old and a putting on of the new. There is nothing essentially evil in any of these things: their clothes, their cleanliness, their earrings. But putting them away is an object lesson, a visible act demonstrating that the burial of the idols affects all of life.

Shechem - make no mistake, the name of the evil person of Genesis 34 has now become the name of a place where evil idols will be buried. Is it possible that more is intimated here? Aren’t idols normally smashed and burned? Isn’t it curious that here that the idolatry and its attendant immorality is placed in a grave under the tree? Maybe as a very dim shadow, but I see a cross and a tomb.

The Blessing of Protection (v.5-8)

Jacob’s continuing act of obedience is surrounded by the protecting hand of God. He was fearful of imminent destruction in Genesis 34:30. But as he moves out towards Luz (Bethel) God caused the people who would have pursued and destroyed to be afraid. So he arrived safely at the place where he had met God before, where God had revealed Himself before. There is so clear a sense of returning, of arriving, of a satisfying being where he is supposed to be. Kneeling in the Presence of our God is the safest and best place to be.

But even here, there can be sadness. Even here, we can lose people we love. Even when God is shielding us from enemies, death can still reach out a cold hand and scythe down Rebekah’s nurse, Deborah. This is the only time in Scripture she is mentioned. But it obviously brought pain and maybe perplexity. Even in Bethel, there is Allon-bacuth; in this world, even in the house of God there are oaks of weeping.
The Blessing of Prominence (v.9-15)

Jacob’s walk with God was grounded in the promises that God had given and the changes God had caused. This paragraph is a rehearsal, a review, a reminder of what God had already done. The verbs here are historical – they are saying what God has done. When we remember God’s person, promises and performance God is showing Himself to us. In this section, God’s speaking here was pointing back to His own character, His granting of a new name and the grand promises He has made.

In this rehearsal of what God has promised, we see a magnificent vista of prominence and prosperity. Twelve sons are the result of being fruitful and multiplying. Here the Adamic and Noahic commands are echoed. Since we have Galatians now, we know that the nation will be physical descendents and a company of nations will be gathered as spiritual descendents. Yes, kings will come from his body, the great king David and last King, Jesus will as well. He will inherit and inhabit the land – the bordered land of earthly Canaan and eventually, the great company of spiritual descendents the unbounded land of heaven and all that will be new in the new creation.

So, this text points us first to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Bethel. He is the indwelling of God, God with us. He is the essence of holy purity. He is our protection and the object of our worship. He is the fulfillment of a people, a king and a land. And we are in Him as the dwelling place, the Bethel of God by the Spirit. So we are to put away our idols, to live in purity. It is gathered as the corporate Bethel, the church, that we are safe and worshippers. And it is in Him and He in us that the new creation is begun, but not yet completely fulfilled.

There is the heart of the tension.

The Sorrows of Disobedience and Death (35:16-29)

In the midst of the journey, there can be such suffering and sorrows. Here is disobedience and death mingled with such sweetness in walking with God.

The Mingling of Birth and Death (v.16-21)

Isn’t this vivid? The sweet pleasure of a son’s birth and the sorrowing pain of a wife’s death joined together. This was truly hard labor. The struggle is evidenced in the names given this last of Jacob’s sons. Rachel called him the “Son of my sorrow”. Jacob called him the “Son of my right hand.” O how Jacob’s heart was entwined with Rachel and her sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Here, this man walking with God, having God’s protection and promises, holds a dying wife and a newborn son. And, for the first time, the Jacob who buries his beloved has become the Israel traveling on (v.20-21).

The Mingling of Sins and Sons (v.22-26)

Doesn’t this ring true? Here was a perverted son who caused shame and here is a parade of sons who invoked pride. Moses places these side-by-side on purpose. Reuben committed incest. He slept with Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid. He may have been wickedly attempting to subvert his father’s place and as-
sert tribal leadership. He may be attempting to pollute Rachel’s side of the family. Israel (Jacob) hears of it. Reuben will hear of it later.

And then the sons listed by their mother. Here is a source of pride. Here were twelve stalwart sons. Yet among them were bloody and devious men. Among them were gentle and God-fearing souls. Even when we are walking with God, sons and daughters can bring such gladness and such grief.

The Mingling of Separation and Reconciliation  
(v.27-29)

Isn’t this sometimes the best and bitterest of life? Jacob came home to his aged father. After many long years he arrived home once again. His mother was dead. His favorite wife was dead. Isaac will only know her by stories. We can image Jacob presenting his sons, touring his wealth, the long story of travel and travail, of bane and blessing. Ah, homecoming is great.

But Isaac was home going. He breathed his last and was gathered to his people. Standing there as they mourn and as they recall were two brothers, finally reconciled and side-by-side at a grave. This is groaning and grieving. This relief is and reconciliation. This is hands on each other’s shoulders and big-bear hugs and soft thumps on the back while tears track sad paths down cheeks.

This should help us. Beginning and ending are mixed in a fallen world. Aching love and loss are mixed in a fallen world. Regret and relationships are mixed in a fallen world. Because we are traveling through, sojourning. Is this just the way it is? No, this is God’s design that we will be constantly reminded that God is here even in the midst of trouble and that here is not home, even in the midst of blessing.

The Surprising Prosperity of the Wicked  
Genesis 36:1-37:1

As the grieving brothers part, Moses keeps Esau in the frame, in camera. Esau grew in wealth, tribal organization and national unity as Edom became a nation. Israel, never forget, Esau is Edom.

His Personal Success  
(36:1-8)

Esau’s success was tied his becoming a Canaanite. His wives were from the land (v.2-3). His sons were born in the land (v.4-5). His riches were acquired in the land (v.6). His possessions became too great to share the land (v.6-7). He moved out of the land and occupied the hill country of Seir (v.8).

He was an enormously prosperous and successful man. But this identification of him with the Canaanites highlights the fact that he was still a wicked man. He had many sons from Canaanite wives; his wealth was acquired in Canaanite lands. He had rejected God, yet was reconciled to Jacob. He was, because of several later texts, rejected by God. He was not a believer. He was a wicked man. His descendents were wicked.
His Tribal Success

(36:9-41)

The flow here is sons to chiefs to kings. Esau’s family, a rich tribe, became Edom, a ruling nation. This is the point of this genealogy. Genealogies may be inclusive or exclusive. Most genealogies in the Mosaic literature are designed to establish the line of David and the Messiah. But this one, like the one of Ishmael earlier, is intended to identify those who are certainly outside the covenant, those who do not inherit the land and have no place in the line of Christ.

His descendents will become a nation called Edom. Edom will become a profanity in the vocabulary of Israel’s history. Moses wants Israel to be clear that Esau is Edom. That identification as a people is repeated in verses 1, 8, 19, 41. That identification with the region or nation is repeated in verses 9, 16, 17, 21, 31, 43.

The point here is that God’s people, living with mingled grief and gladness, must never forget who the wicked really are. Esau may be prospering, growing and becoming the nation whose king and armies now straddle Israel’s route to the Promised Land. But Jacob, Israel and all God’s people know that there is more than just what is promised and received here.

The last verse of Genesis 36 shows Esau and his nation dwelling in the land of their possession. In contrast, Genesis 37:1, Jacob and his tribe are still sojourners in the land they have been promised.

Lessons

A fundamental truth and theme is evident here that we must learn: God’s people live in an already, but not yet tension. Let’s flesh that out a bit and then map it over life.

Jacob and Israel are promised the land and the kingdom and a King. They even at times have it all – living in Palestine, having David and Solomon rule over them in a large and powerful kingdom. But the fulfillment of those promises was still future.

God’s people live in the tension between God’s promises and God’s providences. God promises to provide, protect, heal, sustain, rescue and so on. But we sometimes are needy, hurt, sick, faltering, and enduring what we would like to delivered from. This often causes Christians to be perplexed. It sometimes causes them to doubt God or His Word.

God’s promises are to us now and often received by us much later. In one sense, all of God’s promises are “Yes, and Amen” now. But in another sense, no promise is completely fulfilled until the new heavens and new earth come. So we live in this already and not yet tension. This is not just true of a small group of God’s people, but it actually marks out who are the true people of God. Hebrews 11 says that those with commended faith may not receive what is promised, have hope and joy in suffering and God is not ashamed to be called the God of this kind of people.
So where are we in the midst of this?

What about our aims for walking with God that seems so attended by failure and sin?

What about our families where there is so much mingling of gladness and grief?

What about our trials, troubles and terrors from those who are bent on our harm?

What about destruction, disease and death when we are present possessors of eternal life?

What about conflict, strife, broken relationships and shattered marriages?

When I am trying to please God, why do I struggle with finances and my friends living wicked lives seem to have infinite resources?

Why does life have to hurt so much? Why is there this tension?

From all that we have observed in the life of Jacob as it has reached this climax, here are heart organizing and orienting couplets orbiting around the already and not yet.

Jesus pleased God while enduring suffering; and
Jesus’ enduring suffering pleased God.

The presence of trouble does not mean the absence of God; and
the presence of God does not guarantee the absence of trouble

The promises of God are sure and will be fulfilled; and
the promises of God may not be fulfilled in our lifetimes.

God has designed our trouble to expose our hearts and change our lives; and
God has determined the exact right dose of trouble to meet His design.

The mingling of grief and gladness uproots us from earthly comfort; and
the mingling of grief and gladness uplifts us to our heavenly Comforter.

The fulfillment of all we long for has already been secured by Jesus; and
the fulfillment of all we long for is a not yet, future experience.

This is what it means to be a Christian. Listen to these words from Hebrews that illuminate our lives and point our hopes.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. [Hebrews 11:13-16]

So, yes here is the tension – trouble now, triumph later, and God’s smile all the way.
From Son to Slave
Genesis 37

Introduction
“Do you know why Satan is angry all the time? Because when he works a particular clever bit of mischief, God uses it to serve His own righteous purposes.” This stunning bit of wisdom is no more evident than in the majestic sweep of story we take up this morning.

This story has been the source for a great novel by Thomas Mann. Andrew Lloyd Webber composed the smash hit Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat set to this storyline. Kent Hughes writes, “The divinely inspired account exceeds its fictional renditions with a depth and theological subtlety beyond the intent and capacities of Mann and Webber… The biblical account is at once theological narrative and historical literature that will instruct and challenge all who seriously engage it.” (Hughes, p.435).

The hand of God is all over this long and lovely story. But there are no real miracles here. Here, we do not see the hand of God in parted rivers, water from rocks, morning manna or burning bushes. Instead, we find the hidden hand of God in the ordinary events of life. People’s thoughts are filled with lies and lusts, beliefs and desires that drive some of the most appalling actions and generate powerful emotions. Choices are made. Consequences flow. People thrive or suffer. And over twenty-two years, God is at work bringing about His determined purpose and plan.

Now some of you will be familiar with this story. For that I am glad. Some will not. Let’s come to this as though for the first time, to hear it with all our might. Here is the story this morning of a shocking descent, from son to slave.

From a Privileged Position (v.2-11)
Moses seems to be showing that all is not well with Joseph. Is there some pride of place and folly of youth that is mixed in here? There is certainly the growing conflict, rivalry and strife that will have long and far-reaching consequence. So, Joseph is exalted, elevated as the apple of his father’s eye and in the pride of his own heart.

A Father’s Favor Provokes Rivalry (v.2-4)
Joseph is a responsible and faithful son, even as a seventeen year old. He is sent out to help his half-brothers tend the flocks. He is already showing the promise that would later, through seasoning and suffering, grow into mature leadership. But like all believers, there are remaining elements of sin that God must work on in Joseph’s life. Moses records that he brought a bad report about his step-brothers to Jacob. This report is about the 5 sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. The He-

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brew word for report here has the undertone of a slanderous report. Whether or not Joseph is wrong in this report is not clear from the text. What is clear is that it contributes to the animosity between Joseph and his brothers. Right or wrong, in their minds, he is a talebearer, a tattle. This cannot have endeared himself to them.

*NOTE:* The giving of Joseph’s age here, along with other information in Genesis, allows us to date this event and what follows. This was 1898 BC. This is confirmed by calculating backward from 966 BC, the year the Temple construction began (1 Kings 6:1) with 480 years between the Exodus and the Temple beginning. 430 years between the Exodus and Jacob moving to Egypt (Exodus 12:40; Genesis 45:6) and 22 years between Jacob moving and Joseph’s being sold (Genesis 41:46-47).

Further, Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph and favored him. As a sign of that favor and maybe as a response to his faithfulness, Jacob gave him a coat of many colors, a richly ornamented robe. It probably was a long outer tunic or garment worn over the regular work clothes. Its description may point to its multi-colored hues and dyes which would have marked Joseph and made him stand out in any setting, his brightly colored tunic a sharp contrast to the normally dull colors of the rest. Most are agreed that it also marked Joseph as the favored heir. Jacob, the younger who inherited his father’s place sees no wrong in displacing his eldest son, Reuben, with the eldest son of his favorite wife, Rachel.

O, how the brothers hated him. In their minds, he is the spoiled brat, the mouthy little brother who ratted them out. Of course, he just has to wear that coat to flaunt in their face (whether or not this was what Joseph intended this is how it was taken.) The Hebrew here is interesting, “They could not speak peaceably to him.” They rebuffed all attempts to join in with them, to talk with them. They were harsh, sarcastic and mean.

**A Dream of Ruling Provokes Hatred** *(v.5-8)*

Then, Joseph has a dream. Here is a bit of foreshadowing. Moses is using the dream to put people up on the edge of their seats. The dream is agricultural in nature. In the dream, he and the brothers are out harvesting. They are cutting the wheat, tying the sheaves together to dry and be collected later. Then, Joseph’s sheaf stands upright. The rest of the sheaves gather around and they bow down before his. Clearly, the dream is intimating that Joseph will become the ruler over his brothers.

Joseph may be using the dream as a Divine affirmation of his status as the heir and future patriarch of the clan. Joseph is either innocently naïve or is poking at his brothers. It just seems that discretion would have served him better. Maybe a little sinful pride and self-centeredness is bearing fruit.

God is using the dream to further provoke the brothers. They listen to this dream and recognize what it may intimate. “So, you think you are going to rule over us?” This snoot-nosed daddy’s boy? You think so? While the story of their father Jacob being loved and chosen, though he is the younger, has to be rattling around in their heads. They hate him for his dreams and for his telling them.
A Dream of Submission Provokes Jealousy (v.9-11)
But this is not enough, he has a second dream. He chooses to relate it as well. This dream is celestial in nature. In it, the sun and moon and eleven stars bow down to Joseph. It is obvious that the sun and moon are Jacob and Rachel and the eleven stars are the brothers. He tells the brothers his dream and then repeats it to Jacob.

Well, this is a bit much even for Jacob. He rebukes Joseph. The first dream did not say anything about Jacob. It is focused on earth and is temporal. But this second dream is involving the heavenly bodies and Rachel, who has already died. From Jacob’s reaction, there is probably some “attitude” in Joseph’s repeating the dreams.

Joseph’s second dream provokes the brothers even more. The jealousy here now is venomous and vitriolic. His obvious first place in his father’s heart has now led to usurpation of first place in the family. Now these dreams, coming as a couplet signifying that the events are sure, seem to them to be an attempt to have a Divine attestation. But, this does cause Jacob to pause and reflect on them and to wonder.

To a Terrible Betrayal (v.12-28)
Joseph is in a difficult spot. He is favored by his father and faithful in his responsibilities. He may be a bit unwise in managing his relationships with his brothers. Now he is the object of their jealousy, hatred and anger. No matter what he does in approaching them, they rebuff his overtures (v.4). This will lead to a terrible betrayal.

In the Providence of God (v.12-17)
The brothers have taken the flocks and are pasturing them in Shechem. Jacob is concerned for their safety in this region. He sends Joseph to get a report on how they are doing. Unknown to Joseph, the brothers have moved the flocks up to Dothan. So Joseph is wandering around looking for them. A man gives him directions to where the brothers are, having overheard them say where they were going.

Here is the providence of God at work. Jacob thinks the boys are in a dangerous place. God causes someone to meet up with Joseph and give him directions. God could have prevented what was about to happen any number of ways. But there is no “what if…” history in God’s world. There is the path that it took and no other. So the terrible betrayal is in the providence of God.

With a Murderous Intent (v.18-24)
See the brothers gathered on a hillside, the vast herds scattered around them. From the distance they can see the teen in his robe toiling along the path heading up out of the valley up to hillside towards them. “O, look whose coming! Here comes the dreamer. Let’s kill him and be rid of him. Then what will come of his dreams?” So with murderous intent they plot to kill. But Reuben is shocked. He is not going to let this happen. He counters their plan by suggesting they throw him in a pit or dry well and leave him to die like that. That way, he argues, they
will not be shedding his blood with their own hands. But, he is intending to rescue and restore Joseph to his father.

The Bible leaves the ambush to our imaginations. Certainly they hide their intent with smiling faces. Is Joseph hopeful that maybe all is well? He comes into their midst. They jump him, wrestle him to the ground. They hold him and strip him of his robe. They take him to an old, dry pit or well and throw him down into it. It is too deep and the sides too steep for him to escape.

**By a Shameful Act** *(v.25-28)*

What shameful acts. You have to think that Joseph is stunned, hurt and bewildered. He must also be crying out for them to help him, to think about what they are doing. As his pitiful cries ring up from the depths of the pit, they sit callously down and have lunch. Are they sullen and quiet? I think not. You can hear their jeering and laughter. You can hear them savoring what is going to happen to him. You wonder what are they thinking about the moment when they must tell Jacob.

Then over their lunch and laughter comes the sounds of a camel caravan wending its way around the base of the hillside. They are led and ridden by a team of Ishmaelites. The camels are loaded down with trade goods bound for Egypt. Now Judah has a bright idea. “Rather than killing Joseph, let’s sell him. He wants to rule over us, let’s sell him as a slave. He wants to be the heir, let’s turn him into trade goods. Let’s not have his blood on our hands – after all, he is our brother. Let him suffer the rest of his life as a slave. Besides, if we sell him, we can make a profit.” The callous shamefulness of this suggestion is almost hard to believe.

What a great idea! They join in together, drag Joseph up out of the pit. They hail the Ishmaelites and make their offer. Certainly there was bartering. Here stand ten brothers (Reuben is absent) bargaining to sell their own flesh and blood. Do they own him as their brother? Do they laugh as he pleads with them? Do they shake their heads in wry denial when he claims to be family? The final price is set at twenty shekels of silver (about 8 ounces) – two coins for each brother. What are 2 shekels each in the midst their vast wealth?

There Joseph goes. What an awful betrayal sends him down from being a favored son to a life of slavery.
With a Deceitful Cover-Up (v.29-36)
The brothers head back up the hill to finish their meal. Are they quiet? Are they solemn? Has the weight of their deed begun to settle heavily in their hearts? Or are they relishing the misery this tattler, this daddy’s boy, this dreamer, this usurper is going to experience? Do they amusingly rehearse the tales of Egyptian slavery they know? They plop back down to finish their interrupted lunch.

In a Vile Conspiracy (v.29-33)
Reuben returns to find that Joseph has disappeared. His plan to rescue Joseph has failed! Where has he gone? Reuben is concerned, not only for his father, but also for himself. He will almost certainly be accused of causing his disappearance – he has the most to gain as the natural heir. Could these idiots have killed Joseph in his absence? No, but they have sold him.

Well, how and what are they going to tell their father? Plan A, part 2 of their vile conspiracy. They slaughter a goat, spreading the blood and gore onto Joseph’s coat. Probably they shredded the robe to add to the realism. Then they come to Jacob, dripping, befouled coat in hand. “We have found this coat. It looks like Joseph’s. Please identify it.” Their words as Moses record them are still full of callous venom. They cannot even identify him as their brother, saying “your son.”

Jacob certainly recognizes the robe as Joseph’s. Does he look up into the stern, callous faces of his sons and wonder? But he supplies the obvious interpretation. And along with it will come all the self-accusation and guilt. He has sent Joseph on this mission. He knew the area was dangerous. And now Joseph has met a terrible end, torn to pieces by a wild and fierce animal. If he only knew what kind of fierce animals it truly was!

By a Dishonest Comfort (v.34-35)
Now they cover up their evil deed by a dishonest comfort. Jacob’s grief is deep and terrible. See him stooped and broken. See his garments rent, his head and beard grey with the ashes of mourning. Hour after hour, day after day, he grieves. And they rise to give him comfort, these his sons and daughters. Yet not one of these sons will break their silence. Not one will give true comfort. Not one can say, “Dad, he is not really dead. His fate is terrible; but there is still hope.” And so he refuses to be comforted. His grief is great, but it is idolatrous. Grief is good; refusing to be comforted is not. Setting oneself to grieving the rest of life is symptomatic that Joseph was an idol of Jacob’s heart.

With a Dreadful Consequence (v.36)
Finally, the cover-up continues with dreadful consequence. Someone could have told what actually had happened and a pursuit could have ensued. They could have run down the Ishmaelites and rescued their brother. Their silence condemns Joseph. He is sold in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer in Pharaoh’s court.
What a terrible and sad story. From the heights of being a favored son to the lowliness of slavery in Egypt, Joseph endures such pain. So what challenges us and changes us as we apply some lessons to our lives?

Bad things happen to good people. This is a difficult truth running like a sad and tortured melody through the themes of the Bible. We may be faithful and favored by some; but we may well be despised and hated by others. And sometimes and most painfully, we may be rejected by our families.

We must learn to handle the elevation and honoring of others well. Joseph’s brothers found each step in his rise fueling more and more anger and hatred. We must be alert to every symptom of jealousy. Others may be promoted and honored. You may even deserve what they are receiving. None the less, we must humble ourselves and allow God in His due time to honor us.

The doctrine of the providence of God is not a theological, academic idea to be debated, parsed and relegated to ivory towers. It is a truth, a deep and strong foundation on which to rest at all times. May we be a people whose great inner calm comes from our trust that our Redeemer and Ruler, our kind, loving and sovereign heavenly Father is guiding all things for His glory.

This is the kind of descent our Redeemer made. What amazing parallels are here! From the high favor of His heavenly Father, to the lowly servanthood here on earth, betrayed by one he is close to. But this was so that He could go to a cross-kind of death. There He would bear the punishment for our sins that we might be reunited to our God. This is the gospel, the good news that God has provided His son as the only way to Him. So, believe in Him and bow to Him today.
Be Sure Your Sins Will Find You Out
Genesis 38

Introduction

I am one of a great company people who is intrigued by a set of TV shows on today. CSI – Las Vegas, New York and Miami all portray the behind the scenes work of Crime Scene Investigators. With their technology and skills, no criminal is able to get away with a crime. It is built on the premise that it is almost impossible to do a crime without leaving behind some trace that can be tied to you. Part of the interest in watching the show, aside from the technology which fascinates me, is the satisfaction in seeing justice done. This sense of wrongs righted as also made the Law and Order series one of the television’s greatest dynasties.

Well, God does not have a CSI unit to figure out what happened when we did wrong. His all seeing eye never blinks. He knows our thoughts before we think them. His omniscience is never added to. The hound of heaven is on the trail of sinners. He ensures that our sins will be find out, that justice is always done. So far the truth of God’s sovereign providence has been a comfort – today, it will be a challenge.

The theme of Genesis has been obstacles and advances, the progress of God’s purposes. We have seen how often trouble, disobedience and judgment have seemingly threatened God’s plan. Yet, advances are made. Obstacles are overcome. Out of trouble emerges some of the most amazing advances.

This at first appears to be an odd, out-of-place digression. But the similarities to the initial Joseph account and the contrast it provides for what follows shows that God will preserve his people in general and maintain His particular purpose, the lineage of Judah to David and then to Christ. As Ross writes in the New Bible Commentary, “The story of Tamar and Judah is not irrelevant to the main course of the narrative. In many ways it relates to the rest of chs. 37–50 in themes and phraseology. It is concerned with how the promise of descendants for the patriarchs should be fulfilled. It shows how the hard-hearted Judah was stopped in his tracks, and prepares us for the new compassionate Judah of ch. 44. It tells of yet another twin birth in which the younger overtook the older.”

The story also anticipates the book of Ruth. Here, the line is maintained by what appears to be a sordid entrapment. There, the line is maintained by what is surely a sweet romance. Yet all through these tangled troubles, God is working His decreed will.

But let us take heed as we think through this troubling text. Proverbs reminds us of what is certainly true here, be sure your sins will find you out.

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A Drift into Worldly Values (v.1-11)
This story is taking place while the whole rest of the Joseph narrative is unfolding. Against this sorry background, Joseph shines even brighter. Judah is dazzled by the possibilities and pleasures of the Canaanites. Joseph, will endure and thrive as God’s man in the midst of Egypt. So Judah drifts away from God into worldly ways.

In His Disallowed Marriage (v.1-5)
Against the wisdom of his grand-father and father, Judah marries a Canaanite woman named Shua. Moses is carefully pointing out the consequences of inter-marriage with unbelievers. Like Dinah whose fascination with Canaanite women and their way of life, Judah falls in love with a woman whose worship and walk, whose gods and lifestyle would have been pagan and unbecoming a follower of Yahweh. Judah’s unbelieving wife bears him three sons, Er, Onan and Shelah. Judah is living in a city of the Moabites. He is being slowly assimilated into the Canaanite culture. What a fool is about to make of himself as a result.

We must take careful note of this as Christians. Interest in and dating an unbeliever is a symptom of worldliness. Marrying an unbeliever is sin (1 Corinthians 7:39). The consequences are enormous. I know that the challenges for singles, widows and widowers is great – but commit yourself to being pleasing to God.

In His Extended Family (v.6-10)
Er, Judah’s eldest, reaches marriageable age. In that culture, marriage was often at much younger ages than we are accustomed to. Judah selects Tamar to be Er’s wife. But Er is judged by the Lord for some unrecorded sin and dies.

In the culture of the day and in some cultures today, this idea of Levirate marriage exists. If a man dies without children, then his brother is allowed or required to marry the widow. The children that are born to them are accounted the children of the deceased husband. This practice was later brought into the Law, codified as the Kinsman-Redeemer and becomes the background for the book of Ruth. Interestingly, the Gentiles Tamar and Ruth are in the Davidic lineage through this practice. Since the Lord has come and the preservation of a single Messianic line is no longer necessary, we believe that this practice is no longer allowed.

Judah sends Onan in to fulfill his responsibility, however without the benefit of marriage. Onan did not want to have children by Tamar that would not be his own descendents. He has sexual intimacy with her, but withdraws and will not allow her to become pregnant. He pursues his pleasure without regard to his responsibility. This direct act of disobedience to his responsibility with the effect that it may well end what would be the Davidic line incurs the wrath of God. Onan then is judged by the Lord and dies.

In His Deceiving Fear (v.11)
Two of Judah’s sons have been judged by the Lord and killed. This is a terrible time of grief, confusion and growing concern. His line is in serious jeopardy. He does not want Shelah also to fail, be judged and possibly die. So he makes plans that will postpone the responsibility and possibly protect his remaining son.
He sends Tamar back home to live with her father. He hides his true intention by telling her that she will remain there until Shelah is old enough. But he has no intention of sending his remaining son in to Tamar. To make matters worse, according to the Hittite Law, number 193, Judah is responsible in the absence or inability or immaturity of his son, to continue the family line with Tamar. While this practice is later rejected and denounced in the Mosaic Law, the continuation of the family line is of paramount importance and was allowed at this point. But Judah has no intention of following the law, obeying God or fulfilling his personal obligation.

So here is the man who participated in the plotting of his brother’s death and his selling into slavery. He has married an unbeliever, moved into a Moabite city, watched his sons die under God’s judgment and is now avoiding his responsibility to Tamar. We are warned by this kind of drift into disobedience to careful attention to our hearts. What do we believe, doubt, crave and are mastered by that makes the world attractive? Where are we dazzled by the possibilities and pleasures held out to us as treasures and temptations?

**A Disgrace by Sexual Sin** *(v.12-23)*

Drift into worldly values often will land believers in disgrace and discipline. Judah follows that same path. It was not such a move in his heart from marrying an unbeliever to sleeping with a prostitute.

**Through a Clever Entrapment** *(v.12-19)*

Tamar has little or no recourse against the unjust and sinful neglect of her father-in-law. It is now evident that Judah has no intention of Shelah and Tamar marrying. So, she has planned and carries out a clever entrapment.

Judah’s wife, Shua has died. The time of mourning has passed. Judah decides to go up and see the shearing of his sheep at Timnah where they are pastured. He doesn’t want to go alone, so he takes a Canaanite friend, Hirah, with him. The word of this trip reaches Tamar. She has decided to trap Judah into fulfilling his obligation himself, according to Hittite Law. So, she changes out of her widow’s garb and puts on a prostitute’s attire. She veils her face and waits for him at the gate of Enaim, on the road to Timnah.

Judah, not recognizing her, mistakes her for a prostitute and propositions her, like the foolish men in Proverbs. They negotiate a price of one new goat from his flock. But he will have to send it later. So, what pledge or guarantee will he give that he will do what he has said? He will leave her his signet, neck cord and shepherd’s staff. He has effectively handed her his Social Security number, driver’s license and password to his business network. The signet was used to press his seal into wax for official communication. The cord was his family identity and authority. The staff, usually uniquely carved so as to clearly identifiable as to whose it was, represented his vocation, his business. He has handed her his identity.

He sleeps with her, still not recognizing her. Again, in a culture where women are generally veiled and tents or houses are dark, this is not as strange as it
seems. I wonder what his friend is doing – just waiting outside for him to be done? Does Hirah secretly smile a bit thinking to himself that it is good for Judah to get on with life? But Judah has gotten Tamar pregnant. After he leaves and continues on his journey, she changes back into her widow’s garments and returns home.

**With a Failed Agreement** *(v.20-23)*

Once Judah arrives at Timnah, he selects out a goat to send to Tamar. Hirah agrees to go and deliver it for him and to retrieve his signet, cord and staff. When Hirah arrives at the city, he searches and cannot find her. He inquires of the men standing around to see if they are familiar with her or know where he can find her. They have not seen her – in fact, they have not seen any of the cult prostitutes out at all. This is telling – Judah has not only committed fornication, but he has, as far as he knows, slept with a pagan, temple prostitute and handed over his identity to a cultic priestess.

Well, Hirah goes back to Timnah to report on his failed mission. Can you imagine Judah’s consternation? But what is he going to do? How foolish is he going to appear – because how foolish he has been! He will be a laughing stock. Plus, Hirah is witness that he tried to keep the agreement. I wonder if Judah is waiting for the next shoe to drop!

**A Disclosure in Humbled Chastening** *(v.24-26)*

Well, God is not finished with Judah. He is moving through these circumstances to humble and change Judah into the man he appears to be in Genesis 44. There, he is tender and compassionate, with a heart for his father, brother and their situation. The next two scenes are the mighty hand of God breaking Judah.

**By the Consequence of Sin** *(v.24)*

The time has passed for Tamar to begin showing. Three months have passed. It is evident that she is pregnant. Since her husband is long dead and her brother-in-law, not only failed to do what is right but is also now long dead, then she is accused of being immoral. She has become pregnant by her immorality and thus has polluted the family line.

**With a Self-Righteous Indignation** *(v.25)*

O, the self-righteous indignation! Judah, as the tribal leader, condemns her. Bring her out and let her be burned. The Mosaic Law will also enact the death penalty for a woman’s immorality while living in her father’s household. Tamar stands condemned as shaming her father and polluting the family line. So,Judah calls her out to be executed.

Either her father or representatives of Judah take her out to be executed. Judah is not even present. Can’t you see the scene? Sadly, it is almost clearer in our eyes now because of the coverage of some of the Islamic practice which is so close to this. She is drug out of the tent or house. But clutched in her hands are a signet, a cord and a staff. Can’t you hear her call out, “Wait! I have the identity of the man who has gotten me pregnant! Here are his signet, his cord and his staff. By these you will know who he is. Send them to Judah. You will see that this is not a capi-
tal offense. I have only exercised my rights as a widow. I had to do this because the man identified by these objects would not do what he was supposed to do and left with no justice, no recourse and no sons.”

To a Confession of Wrong

To a Confession of Wrong (v.26)

So they take the items to Judah and ask, “Whose are these?” O, can’t you see the shock on his face! Does his heart sink? Is he smitten in conscience? Yes. He knows these are his. He knows that three months ago he went in to the “prostitute” by the wayside. He knows that he has done wrong by her in several ways. He stands condemned. She has not committed immorality. Their sexual intimacy was permitted by law and by God, at this point.

Judah is humbled and confesses his wrong. Even though she went about it in a wrong way she, Judah recognizes her heart to propagate the line and to get Judah to do what is right. I think that he is greatly humbled and crushed. His sins have caught him out. His daughter-in-law is more righteous than he. And since she is now expecting and the responsibility to produce an heir is fulfilled, he is honorable and is not intimate with her again.

Well, there are lots of questions here, aren’t there. The sexual shenanigans here seem sordid and sorry. Surely, God does not intend approval on anyone here! Judah’s sons are wicked – that is clear from the text. The middle son’s act is wicked in God’s eyes and he is condemned. Certainly, Judah’s going in to a prostitute is sin. It may even be worse, if that is possible, because he believes he has gone in to a cultic prostitute. But what about Tamar? What does it say about Judah that she believes he will succumb to this temptation? Are his sons falling very near the tree?

Moses offers no direct condemnation of Tamar. That is not to say that the way she goes about it is OK. Tamar is Gentile and a Canaanite pagan. Her behavior is not unexpected. This is how unbelievers act. If you marry one or approve your believing children to marry one, then this is what you can expect. But Judah, a believer, is expected to act with righteousness. His sons are held to the standard of God’s revealed will. But Judah has reached the sad, humbling point that a pagan, unbelieving, daughter-in-law has acted even in this way, with more righteousness than he. Here is the point for all God’s people. Obey God. Fulfill your responsibilities. Don’t get sucked into the world’s way. Don’t dishonor our God with shameful conduct.

A Descendent through Difficult Births

A Descendent through Difficult Births (v.27-30)

With Evocative Trouble

We have twins again. It runs in the family. As she is in labor, surely they are telling the stories of Esau and Jacob. Will these births come with their own evocative trouble? Yes. During the labor, one of the twins hand comes out first. The mid-wife ties a scarlet thread onto his wrist to identify him as the eldest. Yet, he draws his hand back in does not come out. The second twin, as the text puts it and as his name says, “bursts through” instead. He is named Perez, which means breach. Then the one with the scarlet thread on his wrist is born. He is named Zerah.
To Continue the Lineage

So what is so important about these twins? According to Matthew 1:2-6, David, the king comes from Judah through Perez. Listen to that text and see if you detect something else also significant.

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, 4 and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of David the king. [ESV]

Do you see it? Matthew points out that there are three significant women in the David and Messianic lineage. They are Tamar, Rahab and Ruth. Why are these three singled out? Because they are all Gentiles. Three Gentile women are brought into the people of God and become part of the Messianic lineage and hope. Here is expectation for the Gentiles. We will become part of the Messianic fulfillment by coming in as the bride and eventual spouse of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. As Paul puts it in Romans, using another analogy, we, both Jew and Gentile will be grafted into the true vine, the Lord Jesus. O, be thankful. God has raised up the dead and fallen, has brought us into true union with Christ and has given us the salvation He has promised to all His people.

Let me summarize some important lessons from this sorry story.

Believers should not date nor marry unbelievers. Listen to me carefully. The New Testament is clear that believers can only marry, in the Lord. Now they can marry any other believer (of the opposite sex). This is not a wisdom nor a preference issue. It is a command, a precept in the Scriptures whose enforcement in consequences and chastening is abundantly illustrated. Wisdom would also dictate then that you do not date an unbeliever, as well.

Let us beware of temptations to pleasure without the accompanying shouldering of our responsibilities. We will often them to be sin. Judah and his sons are willing to take sexual advantage of Tamar and avoid their responsibility. When we are offered shortcuts or to take advantage of a situation or a person’s vulnerability, we should be alerted that somewhere in this, we are being offered the opportunity to sin against God and others.

Never think that you will get away with your sins, even the most secret of them.

Be willing to admit your fault, even when it is exposed by unbelievers. When those moments happen, God is humbling us so that we will be changed and become useful for His glory later.

Rejoice in the Tamar, the Rahab, the Ruth of the Bible. We can enter in. We can become a part of God’s people. The New Covenant is for us. Our salvation is sure through our Redeemer and Ruler, our great high priest and sovereign king, the slaughtered lamb and risen One. Believe, bow – today.
Fleeing Sin
Genesis 39

Introduction

Long is the dusty road from sonship to slavery, from home with father to Egypt. Joseph enters the fabled land lightly bound as a commodity, a slave. Egypt was a dazzling place of wonders and wickedness. Huge buildings and monuments, wide avenues bordered by graceful palms all white in quarried stone spoke of its vast wealth and place in the world. The Egyptians were immersed in a pantheon of idolatry that governed almost every aspect of life. Each region had its own signature god. The gods were awakened each morning. They were bathed in pure water and perfumes. They were fed sumptuous breakfasts and offered sacrifices.

Into this whirling bewildering world, Joseph is plunged. From the simple naivety of a rustic shepherd’s life to the thrumming pace and complex intrigues of the largest commercial city in the world, he comes with quiet heart. Yes, all that follows tells us that he is humbled and bowed in head to his Egyptian masters and in heart to his sovereign God.

While Judah is involved in the sexual shenanigans of Genesis 38, Joseph is rejecting worldliness and sexual temptation in Genesis 39. The sordid story of Judah is the dark shadow against which the bright obedience and faithfulness of Joseph shines.

This is a stunning story of a fierce commitment to righteousness and a false accusation of rape. Yet at each step, God’s guiding hand is moving his being humbled servant and his being trained leader ever closer to the Pharaoh’s court.

Faithfulness Leads to Greater Responsibility (v.1-6a)

Our scene opens with our main character standing on an auction block, far from home. Here, his TRUST in God enables him and encourages him.

In a Difficult Place, Slavery

Imagine yourself as a seventeen year old teenager being sold by your siblings to traders. You are brought to a different country, with a different language, culture and religion. There you are bought by a high ranking military official who serves as the commander of the palace guard. Your master is prestigious, powerful and prosperous. He takes you home and puts in household service.

This is the situation of Joseph. He has fallen from a favored son to a humbled slave. He is another man’s possession. He has none of the comforts of his home, neither the encouragement of his family nor the hope of a bright future. For most of us, we would be grumbling and crumbling. We can hardly stand the adversity of a bit of health trouble, a hard boss, a demanding spouse – how would we possibly bear up under such crushing circumstances?
With a Rising Position, Authority

So Joseph begins to labor in Potiphar’s household. As he works, it soon becomes evident that he is not the norm for slaves. He is faithful and diligent to all the tasks he is given. He is cheerful, respectful and successful in all he does. Potiphar notes that and in conversations with Joseph learns of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Yahweh, the Lord. Joseph must be attributing his attitude and ability to the Lord, for Potiphar sees what is happening as the blessing of God.

Step by step, Potiphar entrusts Joseph with more and more responsibility. As Joseph serves and leads, God blesses what he puts his hand to. Soon, Potiphar has placed Joseph in charge of the whole household. He has become the household manager, overseeing all the laborers and slaves, both in the fields and in the home. Potiphar is being freed from all the grind of daily details so that he can concentrate, presumably, upon his work in the Pharaoh’s court.

To a Growing Prosperity, Blessing

Under Joseph’s hand and with God’s blessing, Potiphar prospers even more. He was already a rich and important person. But it was evident and plain to all that the upsurge in wealth and the lowering of worry were all the result of Joseph’s growing personal skill and attendant Divine blessing. Moses is highlighting the connection between Joseph’s faithfulness and God’s blessing. Joseph is growing in authority and responsibility, a blessing in its own right. But his faithfulness is bringing riches, not to himself, but rather to his master. Potiphar’s household is a preparation time and proving ground for the skills he will need later. God is at work to prepare him for what God will thrust upon him in a national calamity.

God’s people need to learn three important lessons.

*Faithfulness is best exhibited in the midst of severe difficulty.*

The measure of your Christian character and maturity is not in how well you do when all is well, but in how faithful you are in the midst of hardships. We are a soft lot. Where is the tough endurance that will simply keep grinding at the hard tasks of life and ministry? Where is our joyful enduring faithfulness?

*Faithfulness is most blest when it brings good to others.*

We should aim to be faithful so that God’s blessing may bring good to others. Selfishness, not faithfulness, will stay at a task and expect that it will bring the blessing of benefit to me. Will we be faithful when others primarily seem to be benefiting?

*Faithfulness in small things is training for and qualification for responsibility in larger things.*

God intends smaller spheres of life to be the preparation and proving grounds for larger spheres of responsibility. You cannot be an elder unless you have learned to manage your own home well. Elders are primarily trained, not by intense theological instruction, but by practical faithfulness at home.

So faithfulness in the midst of hardship brings ever increasing responsibility and the blessing of good for others.
Faithfulness Enables Sin’s Resistance  (v.6-18)

God’s purposes and plans also include TESTS. Joseph has been faithful to his master, now will he be faithful to his God?

Against a Persistent Temptation, Refusal  (v.6-10)

In a ironic twist, Joseph has been so responsible that Potiphar’s only concern at home was his food. But evidently, he should have been paying attention to his home more carefully. He really should have been concerned about his wife.

Joseph was a handsome man. He was not only good looking, as Moses puts it, but evidently his character and personality were winsome and attractive. Potiphar’s wife casts her eyes upon him in lust. She tempts him, inviting him to come lie with her. She begins with an invitation, words of persuasion.

Joseph refuses her. He is in a position of trust, not just authority. He has been given responsibility over everything in the household, except Potiphar’s wife. Not because necessarily it ever occurred to Potiphar to exclude her, but rather because she was his wife. Potiphar trusts him and he will not violate that trust.

Joseph also refuses her because he will be faithful to God. He knows that this is a great sin. He knows that God has forbidden adultery. He will not sin against God. It might be possible to hide this from Potiphar, but not from God. Notice how he phrases this as a question, a question of amazement and reverential fear. “How can I possibly do this and sin against God?”

But she was constantly trying to get him to bed her. Wisely, he not only refuses in the face of this persistent temptation to not lie with her, be he also refuses even to be with her. He refuses to spend time with her even in casual interaction. You would think that this would be noticeable to Potiphar. My guess is that her flirtatious manner and seductive ways were no surprise to him. But faithful Joseph is trusted implicitly.

In an Aggressive Seduction, Flight  (v.11-12)

We all know the little saying about “a woman scorned…” Joseph is about to find out. One day when Joseph is in the house doing his work, Mrs. Potiphar notices that there are no other men in the house. They are effectively alone. Whatever happens now, there will be no one to catch them and no one as a witnesses. She has been scheming to waylay him, to overcome his avoidance of her and his resistance against her.

On this day, I think we have more than words. Now, she is aggressively seducing him. She reaches out to grab his garment, to get his attention and maybe even to undress him. Her former attempts have persistent, but more demur. Not now – she has grabbed him and ordered him, this slave, to lie with her. In the face of this aggressive seduction, Joseph turns to leave. But she has hold of his garment. She won’t let go and he can’t break loose, so he shucks it off and runs from the house.
With a False Accusation, Ruin (v.13-18)

She cannot believe he has done this to her! How dare he? Who does he think he is? She is going to destroy him. With the coat in her hand, a plan forms in her mind. See her follow him out to the porch, her clothing in disarray and maybe even torn, her makeup mussed, one sandal missing, face flushed and breath short. Ah, the very picture of an innocent wife assaulted in her own home. As he flees away, she calls out to the men who were working nearby. Listen to her disdain for Potiphar. “He has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us.” Do you hear? It is becoming evident that her attempt to seduce Joseph was in some way aimed at Potiphar.

Listen to her accusation against Joseph, “He came in to the house to lie with me and I cried out and defended myself. Look, I have his clothes right here in my hand.” So here is the evidence: he took advantage of no one being in the house and his special position as being the household manager, he was seen running from the house. No one responded to her cry for help. He left his garment (some think this may well have been the wrapped undergarment that Egyptian men wore under their tunics).

She repeats this to Potiphar. She, who has acted with depraved dishonor stands with affronted righteousness. Through it she is challenging Potiphar’s judgment, blaming him for creating the situation. She is accusing Joseph of attempted rape, destroying his character. This is one crafty, wicked woman worthy almost any soap-opera.

Let’s consider the following before we move on.

**Faithfulness will not guarantee that you will never face temptation even powerful ones.**

Walking with God in daily faithfulness is no guarantee that He will not allow you to be tempted. Jesus lives a perfectly holy life and is besieged by temptations from without.

**Faithfulness in temptations will focus primarily on not sinning against God, as well as not violating the trust of others.**

Living “before the face of God”, that is, the fear of God, will strengthen our resolve and sustain our righteousness even in the midst of the most provocative of temptations.

**Faithfulness in temptation may incur the anger and false accusations of others.**

Resisting sin, particularly when we are resisting a temptation offered by someone, may well put us in their cross-hairs. Do not be surprised when sinful people try to destroy you for refusing temptation.

So the faithfulness of God’s people, to God and to others around them, enables resistance to sin and persistence in righteousness.
Faithfulness is not Always Rewarded  (v.19-23)
So, what will happen now? Will God intervene to expose the false accusation? Will Joseph’s faithfulness be rewarded? Not as it appears at this point. The transforming work of God’s providence allows another fall, a fall from slavery to prison.

In an Unjust Punishment, Humility  (v.19-20)
When Potiphar hears the words, “Your servant has treated me this way,” Potiphar is angry. Who he is angry at is ambiguous. Presumably, he knows what she is like. He doubts her story. He may well be angry with her for putting him in his situation. How do we know that? Because the normal punishment under Egyptian code, for any rape by a slave, was execution by the master’s hand. But this is not what Potiphar does. He puts him in the court prison. If he is truly angry with Joseph, then confine him in the Pharaoh’s prison?

Just as Moses had repeated several times about Joseph’s going down to Egypt, down to Egypt as a slave, he repeats that Joseph now goes down to prison. He is in a prison where the Pharaoh’s prisoners are kept. It is unjust and humiliating. It seems to be another step down. It reminds Israel of their own history. They went down to Egypt. They became slaves in Egypt. They were prisoners in Egypt. All these steps down though are in God’s plan, guided by His providential care.

In a Terrible Circumstance, Grace  (v.21-23)
But even in prison, Joseph is a faithful man. There he is given more and more responsibility. Again, I take this as confirmation that Potiphar is somewhat looking after him. It is a cruel mercy, but better than death. Soon, he, as a prisoner, is second-in-charge of all the wards. The jailor, like Potiphar, trusts Joseph so much that he needs to pay little attention to the running of the prison.

How does Joseph do this? The Bible attributes his amazing maturity and success to three key elements:

*Faithfulness is encouraged by recognizing the steadfast love of God.*

Here is God’s covenant love, unfailing and unfading even in the loneliness and unloveliness of an Egyptian prison.

*Faithfulness is enabled by the strengthening grace from God.*

Everywhere that Joseph has served, God has given him favor in the eyes of his masters. This showing favor is an Old Testament way of speaking of the enabling grace of God. Its effect is to energize hard work in difficult circumstances and to cause even unbelievers to acknowledge it and respond to it.

*Faithfulness endures when it is seen as serving labor for God.*

Joseph sees himself as serving God. He resists the seductive power of both a lady and laziness. Here in prison, he could have succumbed to the self-pity of laziness and indolence. But he does not. He simply moves forward with faithful diligence even in the midst of the most terrible and trying of circumstances.

So, faithfulness may not be rewarded by preserving us from trial or trouble.
As we have moved through the text this morning, we have illuminated some important lessons we need to learn. As we close, let us again highlight these for our growth and change.

- Faithfulness is best exhibited in the midst of severe difficulty.
- Faithfulness is most blest when it brings good to others.
- Faithfulness in small things is training for and qualification for responsibility in larger things.
- Faithfulness will not guarantee that you will never face temptation even powerful ones.
- Faithfulness in temptations will focus primarily on not sinning against God, as well as not violating the trust of others.
- Faithfulness in temptation may incur the anger and false accusations of others.
- Faithfulness is encouraged by recognizing the steadfast love of God.
- Faithfulness is enabled by the strengthening grace from God.
- Faithfulness endures when it is seen as serving labor for God.

Jesus is faithful in all that God gave him. He was severely tempted, falsely accused and put to death. His faithful service to God and righteousness brought good to others, that is, our salvation. Joseph then points us to both the person of the Lord and a pattern of Christian living to be embraced with joy.

Are you a faithful person? Let’s examine ourselves carefully:

- Are regularly and diligently doing your work at home?
- Are you faithful to all your tasks and responsibilities at work or school?
- Are you doing all the work of one anothering, serving with your gifts, diligent to care about others, attending to your Bible reading and prayer?
- Are you resisting sin, faithful to God? What destructive temptations are being offered you and how are you refusing and running?
- Are you faithful when it is hard: when there are difficult trials, setbacks, opposition, false accusations, loss of status, place, position, power?

May God raise up many Josephs among us: believers who are faithful in being trusted, while being tested and faithful in the midst of trials.
The Ups and Downs of God’s Providence
Genesis 40

Introduction

It’s a roller coaster sometimes. Our lives are not this even experience of lightly mingled joys and pains. Now it interests me that we will pay lots of money, stand in long lines in blistering heat, be strapped in an uncomfortable seat all for the thrill of a roller coaster ride. We yell and scream – our hearts are up in our mouths and then down in our boots. As it judders to a stop at the end, “O, let’s go again.” But let life be like this, we are not quite so thrilled. We yell and scream – for it to stop. But the simple reality is that God’s providences are sometimes slow long climbs and sometimes quick savage falls with nasty unexpected turns and twists.

So, how do we serve well when hope is hard? How will you remain faithful, obedient, sweet, and joyous when the ride is not thrilling? When the providences of God seem to be dumping you down into deep dark tunnels and pits?

Well, what is God up to? For many centuries the primary weapon in warfare was a sword. In different times, different swords were prized for their design and their manufacture. In Roman days, the double edged Roman short sword was favored and feared across most of the known world. In the dark ages, the Muslim armies were armed with long curved scimitars that swung like hard guillotines in the hands of skilled warriors. Owning a fine Toledo blade was the dream of every soldier and nobleman during the Renaissance. Famed for their weight, heft, reach and edge, to this day Toledo blades are sought after by collectors and fencers. Britain’s mighty world-spanning armies carried the grand Wilkinson sword mark on blades of several varying designs. Today, Marines long to be handed the sword that marks an officer of distinction. In all these, whatever their design and whoever their manufacturer, the sharpness and durability of their edge was the key. [Adapted from Kent Hughes, Genesis].

This is what God is doing in the difficult times – He is forging and sharpening His sword for effective and durable use. God has taken Joseph from Canaan to Egypt. He has been sold into slavery to an Egyptian court military officer named Potiphar. Serving with distinction brought him the unwanted advances of Potiphar’s wife. His rejection of her led to a false accusation of rape. The next long stroke of the sharpening steel sends Joseph to a prison, still under the watchful eye of Potiphar.

Here is another of those Hebrew linguistic structures that provide the key to the text. This is the parallel structure called by its Greek name, a chiasm. The outline in the sermon and on the PowerPoint reflects that structure. Allen Ross in Creation and Blessing (p.631) points out how this structure makes this chapter a unit. At the center then of the story is the appeal to be remembered and the pathos of being forgotten.

In all these things, Joseph is remaining faithful to God and caring about people even in the ups and downs of God’s providences.
A  Change: Meeting in Difficult Times  
(v.1-4)
What long years are wrapped up in this simple phrase, “sometime after this.” Joseph is 17 when sold into slavery, 28 when this chapter takes place for 2 years later, he is 30 when he becomes prime-minister. We do not know how long he was in Potiphar’s house. But we know that from going down to Egypt and to the events of this chapter is 11 years. Think back 11 years ago in your life. Imagine if all you could remember was slavery and prison.

Here in the bottom of the prison (referred to here as the “pit”) Joseph is still faithful and obedient. But now, he is given the responsibility to take care of two felons. These men were the Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker. Both of them were charged with the responsibility in Pharaoh’s court of ensuring that the Pharaoh was not poisoned by his enemies. That both of them are imprisoned implies that they were implicated in a conspiracy to commit regicide, the murder of ruler. It may well have been, given the capriciousness of rulers, that these two had offended the Pharaoh by simply some casual comments or jokes made in the pursuit of their work in the kitchens and courts that got back to the Pharaoh.

Nevertheless, here they are, political prisoners at the bottom of the prison rungs. However, they are put in the custody of Potiphar who installed them in the prison where Joseph was. He was assigned to them to attend to them. What a nice reward for faithfulness and diligence. Here are two mighty who have fallen from a chief position to a dire circumstance. They are now Joseph’s responsibility.

It is a bit difficult to parse the phrases here: “custody in Potiphar’s house” seems to imply something different than “in the prison where Joseph was”. Whether this means that Joseph was moved to a prison on Potiphar’s property or whether this means that Potiphar was assigned to his custody and then he put them in the same prison Joseph is in is unclear – I prefer the second. The cupbearer and baker are in the custody of Potiphar and in the confinement of prison. Either way, this involves a big change for Joseph. He has been responsible for the whole prison under the warden. Now he is responsible for these two prisoners. Now this is not a duty filled with honor. They are not Enron executives in paradise-prison. They are basically on death row, as we later find out. This is another step down, another hard providence. Here is temptation to slump and shrivel or opportunity to serve faithfully.

B  Care: The Inquiry into the Dreams  
(v.5-8)
So how will Joseph treat them? Would you not be tempted to be harsh, to see them as the cause of this piece of your trouble? Wouldn’t it be easy not to empty the chamber pot every day? To clamp the chains on just a bit too tight? To be sure the ticking has just a few bugs in it? The food a little colder and greasier? We all would find ourselves just a bit hard eyed and callus, wishing them harm.

But Joseph retains his compassion, his care for people. These two have a restless night in which they have dreams, both of them. Egyptians put great stock in dreams. They believed that when you slept, you were in touch with the spirit realm. Dreams were messages from the gods inhabiting that realm. But in order for dreams to be interpreted, you need access to a priest or priestess who would use a set of Dream Books to unlock the codes and hidden mes-
sages in your dreams. Obviously, this is not going to happen while confined in prison. So they awaken in the morning distressed and shaken.

Joseph sees their countenance and is concerned. You can well imagine that these men were at the edge of their ropes. Their shuffling walk and downcast faces, their mumbled words and anxious looks all spoke volumes to Joseph. So he inquires. He moves into their lives with a simple question. They explain their dilemma. They have had dreams that surely are full of meaning but have no way to interpret them. What will they do?

Joseph responds by directly challenging their idolatry and paganism. Dreams do not belong to the realm of idols. Dreams that truly are clear communication from deity are from the Lord God. They belong to Him. As a servant of the Most High and Only God, who owns dreams and speaks through them in prophetic vision, then tell Joseph the dream.

As one commentator puts it, Joseph has a “God-reflex”. He is living constantly before the face of God. He seems to respond to situation after situation with God-talk. He is not embarrassed or ashamed. You have a dream? I have a God who interprets. You are downcast and disheartened, how can I connect you with my God?

Now is not the time to get wrapped up in some theology of dreams and interpretations. We know that God has chosen at specific points and times to communicate through dreams and visions. These all were in the category of revelation and required interpretation. With a sufficient word today, your dreams probably more reflect the state of your stomach and the state of your soul than any stream of words from God.

C Encouragement: Cupbearer’s Dream (v.9-13)

The cupbearer begins by giving his dream. It is interesting that the dream is in the realm of his own experience and concerns. He sees a grape vine as it blossoms, then buds and finally produces grapes. He sees himself pressing out the grapes into Pharaoh’s serving cup and then placing the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.

Ah, you can almost see Joseph smile. The blindness of the cupbearer’s ignorance and idolatry keeps him from understanding what actually is pretty plain. Those who worship God often have a clearer understanding of what is plain but hidden from the wicked. So he interprets the dream – in three days, the cupbearer will be restored.

Now this is an encouraging word. Notice how he puts it. The cupbearer will be lifted up and restored to his former place and position of honor and service. This is no grudging, jealous, short word from Joseph. This is good news in good words with good effect.
D Appeal: The Plea to be Remembered (v.14-15)

Ah, but Joseph will now have a friend in high places. So he makes an appeal, a plea to be remembered.

The appeal is for the cupbearer to remember him when he is restored. He will be serving once again in the Pharaoh’s court. He will even have the eye and ear of the Pharaoh. His appeal is for a return in kindness. He has treated him well when most would not. He has interpreted his dream solely as a witness for God and the good of the man. So when you are there and rejoice in the good of restoration, think of me and speak of me.

Joseph’s appeal points to the injustice of his situation. He has done no wrong. The cupbearer will certainly understand this. He also has been wrongly incarcerated. He knows this place and its pains. Joseph has suffered much more. He has been sold and now falsely accused and unjustly imprisoned. “Please, you know what this is like,” he seems to say. “You were wronged. I have been wronged. I don’t deserve to be in this land. I don’t deserve to be in this prison. Please don’t forget me and do bring me to Pharaoh’s attention so that I may get out of here.”

What is clear here that Joseph is not a fatalist – he is not simply resigned that his present place is an irreversible fate. He is seeking a way out while serving faithfully in his place. This is a difficult tension to sustain. But this is the Bible’s idea of faithfulness. It is a patient obedience while waiting with hope for God to move and taking opportunities as wisdom dictates.

C Warning: The Baker’s Dream (v.16-19)

The baker hears the wonderful news for his friend and is encouraged to tell his own dream and get its interpretation. His dream, like the cupbearer’s is about the familiar things of his former life and position. He had dreamed that he was carrying three large bread baskets on his head. These were full of bread baked for the Pharaoh. But as he is walking along, the birds are coming to rest on top basket and are eating the bread from it.

This dream is not as clear on its surface. Generally, in the Scriptures and in revelation, birds are seen as symbols of evil or ill fortune. Joseph does not shrink back from telling this interpretation either. He is committed to tell the truth as God has given it, no matter how hard it may be. This dream is warning the baker that in three days he will be executed in ignominy by the Pharaoh.

While this is not what the baker wanted to hear, it is still the truth. It is what God is communicating. We, like Joseph, must be committed to telling the truth, yes in love, but still telling the truth even when it is not what people want to hear. It is the responsibility of God’s people to represent
God’s agenda. Hard truth is still truth. It is unkind, unloving and in many cases, sinful to withhold the truth when we ought to give it.

B Success: The Fulfillment of the Dreams (v.20-22)
Joseph’s interpretation and thus his standing as a spokesman from God and an interpreter of God’s revelation is authenticated as the events unfold. In the Bible, a person claiming to speak to God and prophesying the future was required to absolutely correct. Even those who could work attesting miracles were still stoned if their prophesies did not come true.

But what Joseph predicted comes to pass. These two dreams and their interpretation unfold just as he said. Three days after making the interpretation, the Pharaoh gives a birthday party. He makes a feast for all his servants to enjoy in his honor. He remembers these two. He may also have confirmation of the innocence of the cup bearer and guilt of the baker.

What a moment it must have been deep down in that prison. The tramp of feet in the hall, the clanging of keys in the door. The cup bearer is handed his clothes and staff of office. He is told to wash and anoint himself. Afterward he is join the festivities in the Pharaoh’s court and be restored. But, hear the sinking heart and groans of the baker. If one is restored as Joseph said, then his fate is sealed. It is time to die. So the dying tread of steps down the hall lead that prisoner to be impaled on a stake, hung on a tree. Writhing in pain, covered in blood and shame, he dies.

A Pain: Being Forgotten in Good Times (v.23)
Joseph watches as his interpretations unfold into reality. Wonder if he recalls his earlier dreams? Wonder if he considers that they may still unfold? Is this the source of his hope and steadfastness? Has he hoped in God who has pointed through those dreams to some unimaginable success and restoration in the future? Ah, can he now see the horizon of freedom? Does he pray and praise as the cup bearer with light step marches to return and restoration?

Ah what a sad line. How quickly hope fades. How soon pain returns as a familiar friend. Joseph is forgotten. The whetstone of God’s sharpening is once again running over the edge of His being forged sword. For two long years he waits, forgotten. For two long years God continues to forge and make His man ready. But be assured, it is not easy. But he will wait. He will wait with patience and obedience. He will move toward His God. He will not become bitter or angry or downcast. He will become a sharp and bright sword no matter how hot and hard the forge may be.
Joseph models for us the deep inner peace and steady dependence on God when it may seem unbearable. The ups and downs of God’s providences are not just endured, but rather actively embraced and met with courage and compassion. Joseph is an example for us whose life was written for our instruction to point us to Christ and to practical godliness. (1 Corinthians 10)

Let’s take what we have observed and link the words together as a guide for steadiness and faithfulness in the midst of the mess.

**CHANGE**

Recognize that the changes God brings are opportunities for new relationships, responsibilities and realities. In your changing circumstance, who are the new people to meet? What deft strategy of God has wrought this change for your good and His glory?

**CARE**

Keep a focus on people around you, particularly those with cares and concerns. When it is darkest and you want to be cared for, this is the time to look away from yourself to care for others. Even on the cross, Jesus cares for His mom. Don’t let darkness blind you to others.

**ENCOURAGEMENT**

Be willing to serve others well in a way that uses truth to encourage and motivate them. Make truth the way you share hope and keep others encouraged.

**APPEAL**

Recognize opportunities for change without making escape the primary aim and without manipulating people.

**WARNING**

Be willing to serve others well in a way that uses truth to exhort and warn them. Be so committed to truth that you will not shrink back from it even though it is not what they want or even hope to hear.

**SUCCESS**

Be humble and joyful in the midst of successes. Even when things are very hard, recognize that gifts, skills and experiences are being given for ministry to others. You may well be receiving authentication as well as ability.

**PAIN**

Be willing to endure pain, loneliness, disappointment and discouragement while waiting for the purposes and plans of God to unfold. Align yourself with God’s agenda. The trajectory may be a long one with its end out of sight – so look to it with faith and hope.

For the glory and joy set before Him, Jesus endures the cross. So should we. In the midst of the ups and downs of God’s good and wise providences, be faithful and obedient, before the face of God.
The Rise to Power

Genesis 41

Introduction  Obstacles and advances, the book of Genesis keeps launching and moving the great purposes of God along. Creation is ruined by the fall but from it later men and women call upon the name of the Lord. Cain kills Abel, but God appoints Seth. Wickedness prevails until a world-wide judgment in the flood. Then Noah emerges and builds an altar to the Lord. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob all appear, often great in faith and hope and sometimes overtaken in folly and sin. The sons who are to become the tribes of Israel – well, some are murderers and violent. Judah from whom the King will come seems to have totally messed up, sleeping with his daughter-in-law and yet God protects the lineage. Then, in a mighty terrible deed of hatred and jealousy, these brothers sell one of their own into slavery. The flickering candle of God’s plan seems at this moment to be fluttering out. But we have come to expect some great turn.

Most all of us can look back over our lives and identify a major turning point…

Eleven long years have passed since that terrible day seared forever in Joseph’s memory. His brothers binding him and then selling him. The long years in Potiphar’s service and then the Pharaoh’s prison. Hope had brightened at the release of the cup bearer. But now for two long years, Joseph has been waiting for the knock at the door. It finally comes.
The Occasion of His Rise (v.1-36)

In the Troubling Dreams (v.1-8)

God moves begin Joseph’s rise to power. He sends two troubling dreams to Pharaoh. The first of these dreams was about seven superb cows devoured by seven ugly, thin cows. The second was about seven full ears of grain devoured by seven blighted ears. He is very disturbed by these dreams so he called for his dream interpreters and magicians. But none of them could tell him what those dreams meant.

With a Timely Recommendation (v.9-13)

This must have been much discussed at court. The cupbearer sees and hears the distress of his ruler. Suddenly, he is reminded of his own troubling dream and the Hebrew prisoner who rightly interpreted it. He rehearses his story to the Pharaoh. He tells how the Hebrew prisoner was not only able to interpret the dream, but it also comes to pass.

Now we begin to see what was going on. Our sovereign God brought three prisoners together, gave two of them dreams and one the ability to interpret. God is moving to bring this Hebrew slave, Joseph, to the Egyptian throne-room.

By a Troubled Report (v.14-24)

Pharaoh summons Joseph who prepares himself and appears before him. Here is one of the details in the Bible that rings true. Joseph shaves himself, referring probably to his head. To appear before the Pharaoh with a shaved head was to honor him and show him respect. The Pharaoh declares that he has heard that Joseph has a talent for interpreting dreams.

Pharaoh rehearses the dreams to Joseph. He faithfully reports what he has dreamed. Moses here records it again in detail. There is a care and attention to getting the elements right. Ah, here stands Joseph at the age 30 ready to interpret for a Gentile King what God’s revelation means. Here, Joseph begins to foreshadow Daniel who also rises to greatness and position in a Gentile court furthing the purposes of God as man who speaks for God and lives for God.

As an Authorized Interpreter (v.25-32)

The first and last words Joseph speaks are “God.” (See v. 25,32) Even before such a one as the Pharaoh, he will glorify God. He immediately corrects Pharaoh by pointing to God as the source of the dreams and the giver of the interpretations. It is God who is being gracious by revealing to the Pharaoh what is about to take place so that action can be taken.

So, Joseph interprets the dream. The seven good cows and seven good ears of corn represent seven years of plenty. The seven lean cows and seven diseased ears of corn represent seven years of famine. The seven years of famine will bring to ruin the prosperity of the seven bountiful years. It will be a famine so devastating that the years of plenty will be forgotten.

Joseph also announces that the dreams occurring twice in two forms means that the events they indicate will most certainly come to pass (v.32). This is not some-
thing to gloss over. These events are not the product of mere chance or idolatrous fictions. They will happen because the God of the universe has determined it to be so, has declared to be so and will certainly do what he has decided.

**As a Wise Counselor** (v.33-36)

He counsels the Pharaoh. Curiously, he does not seem to hesitate. He stands, prisoner though he be, a wise and accomplished steward and household manager. His credentials and resume’ even in prison seem to stand behind the counsel he is about to give. But I suspect that there is more to it. This is not confidence born of skill but urgency arising from confidence in the reliability of God’s revelation and the reality of what is about to transpire.

His counsel is wise and prudent. The years of plenty must be years of gathering and storing up. When the wasting years of destruction and famine, come then there will be provision. His plan is not a grandiose one. It is elegant in its simplicity and yet profound in its appeal. He recognizes the need to a detailed program and an able man to lead it. If all were to be spared the devastation of the famine, then they must take heed to the warning God has given.

**The Outworking of His Rise** (v.37-57)

Pharaoh and his servants are pleased at the proposal. But who will lead this great project?

**In the High Appointment** (v.37-45)

Who else but Joseph? Who else has the very Spirit of God in him? Now wait, this is quite a surprise. The Pharaoh recognizes that Joseph is full of the Holy Spirit. He is uniquely qualified then, not only as the interpreter of God’s revelation, but also as the implementer of the plan. But you have to ask, why is this about the Holy Spirit given here – at this point?

God’s people will know how to identify their leaders – they are men who will be able to interpret God’s revelation by the power of the Holy Spirit who indwells them. The Word and Spirit are being linked. If the dream to Pharaoh is God’s revelation and the interpretation to Joseph is God’s work, then the Holy Spirit is the one involved. Why is this important? Because when the greater Joseph, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus comes, He will have the Holy Spirit upon Him without measure. He will do all He does by the Spirit. And if He does, then so must we. The Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit who indwells us now enables the man of God to understand the Word of God and lead the people of God. The Spirit indwelling gives wisdom, discretion and ability.

So Joseph becomes the vice-regent in Egypt. All that transpires here is the granting of this power to Joseph. Only in matters that the Pharaoh reserves to himself and his throne will he be greater than Joseph. He was given the signet ring to authorize his orders, the golden chain as a sign of his office and the very expensive clothes as is befitting his place. This is a magnificent elevation. In one day, Joseph rises from the pit in the prison to having all Egypt bow before him as rides
in his chariot. He has gone from utter powerlessness to almost unlimited authority. He has risen from the poverty of prison to the wealth of the throne.

The Pharaoh also gives him an Egyptian name and grants him a bride. The giving of this name is important to his being able to disguise himself in later years. The brothers will never hear him addressed by his Hebrew name until nearly the end of the story.

**By the Wise Implementation (v.46-49)**

Joseph implements the plan he had proposed. God blessed in the years of plenty so much that all that Joseph gathered could not be measured. He built granaries near the cities so that the food would be easily accessible. Through the long years of prosperity he sustained the project and kept it going. His faithfulness during fruitfulness would later be the salvation of all during famine.

**With the Delights of Family (v.50-52)**

In the last year of the good years, just before the famine began, Joseph became the father of two boys. The fact that they are named with Hebrew names likely indicates that Asenath is bowing to Yahweh. In the long tradition of his family, he now has twin boys. He names them Manasseh and Ephraim.

We must not miss why Joseph named them as he did. Over Manasseh he exclaims, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” The pain of terrible memories is washed away in the joy of God’s evident goodness. To make his life full and complete, here is his first born son.

Over Ephraim, he says, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.” Here I believe is one of the secrets to the faithfulness of Joseph. He sees whatever reward he has as coming from the hand of God. He has determined to be faithful in whatever he is to do. But the fruit, the results that come from that are all God’s doing. Egypt is still a land of affliction. But here God has made him fruitful.

**Until the Devastating Famine (v.53-57)**

Just as God has said and Joseph had planned for, the famine came. It did not take long for the people to be in dire straits. They cried out to the Pharaoh for help. He sent them to Joseph who opened the storehouses and sold them the grain.

The final sentence is the road sign along the path of God’s sovereign purposes. The mighty, terrible famine is not just in Egypt, but covers the whole world. So the long crook of the sovereign Shepherd reaches out to bring Jacob and his family down to Egypt.
As we close, think with me on several important lessons.

**Lessons**

We are reminded that the sovereign God is ever and always pursuing the outworking of His purposes and plans. Though it took two long years of waiting, God sends the dreams to Pharaoh at just the right time.

In the shadows Joseph casts across this text, we can hope to see the ever richer and fuller realities of Jesus Christ. This story of away from home, down into servanthood, cast into prison when falsely accused and an elevation to the throne as the Spirit-filled interpreter of God’s revelation enriches our understanding of Jesus. He left his home for us. He was falsely accused and eventually executed. Three days later, the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead and forty days later ascended into heaven. Unlike Joseph, He did not do all this for Himself. He did it for those who will believe in them. Unlike Joseph who brings about a physical salvation, Jesus brings about a spiritual salvation. Joseph delivers from famine; Jesus delivers from sin.

Whether we are experiencing the hard and good providences of God, let us be bouncing Manasseh and Ephraim on our knees. May we forget all our hardships as we see the provisions and purposes of God. May we be fruitful in the land of our afflictions. May the sweet providences of God sustain faithfulness, forgetfulness and fruitfulness until our Redeemer and Ruler comes.
Troubled Souls in Testing Trials

Genesis 42

Introduction

Many people today are uneasy, anxious and disquieted in soul. With ever more riches and ever louder entertainment and ever more frenetic activity, they try to drown out the quiet voice of conscience. But its whispers are persistent and disturb people’s peace.

What a tricky thing we have made guilt out to be. Psychology as an alternative spirituality attempts to demonize guilt. Many Christians are overly concerned that preaching and counseling, Biblical rebuke and correction, are just out put them a guilt trip. Yet, the Bible declares that guilt is a grace. It is a grace when the Spirit points to our sin and we stand charged before God.

But what has guilt to do with our story today? Joseph has declared over his new born sons, “God has made me forget…all my father’s household.” (41:51) No sooner does he say this than his brothers turn up. How will a faithful and fruitful man deal with those who have sinned against him? Will he strike out in revenge? Will he ignore their sin with weak and foolish craving for reconciliation? Or will he show us God who moves with consummate skill to trouble our souls with testing and trials?

God is at work to bring the family together once again. But He will not do so without settling those matters of sin. But trials must come to test these brothers, to awaken and trouble their souls.

Note:

The structure here is in seven scenes making up a four-fold chiasm.

At Home in Troubling Circumstances (v.1-5)
  Confrontation over their Purpose (v.6-17)
  Confrontation over their Proof (v.18-25)
At Home with Troubling News (v.26-33)

This is Mother’s Day. Most messages preached today will be sweet and soothing. But this is the text today for us. Maybe there are broken family relationships that need exposing to trials so that suave, unaffected consciences will become so troubled that they will seek forgiveness at the cross and peace in reconciliation.
Their Terrible Circumstances  
(v.1-5)

The text opens with a scene of growing desperation.

The Famine in their Land

Genesis 41:47 sets the background. There was a worldwide famine. Egypt had set aside an immeasurable trove of food. The Pharaoh had put Joseph, a son and brother in this family who had been sold into slavery and eventually promoted to the vice-regency through his God-given skills and gifts, into charge of collecting and distributing the grain. Now, all over the world, hopeful eyes and hungry bellies are turning to Egypt and making the long trek there for food.

The Fear in their Hearts

The news of the bounty in Egypt comes to Jacob, the patriarch’s ears. The dialog here shows the fear in their hearts. The sons are afraid of Egypt. The father is afraid that some misfortune will happen to the last son of his beloved wife as he believes happened to Joseph.

But they must go or they will starve and die. So, ten of the brothers begin the journey to Egypt leaving the youngest, Benjamin at their father’s knee.

Their Alarming Confrontation  
(v.6-17)

The long journey is hidden from our eyes. We are brought, it seems, to an open area, possibly near one of the vast granaries. There, 10 young men move in the line awaiting their turn.

The Accusation of a Crime  
(v.6-9)

They come before a stern, powerful man bedecked with the symbols of his position and power. Neither by his name nor by his face do they know him. And so they bow to the ground, these brothers ten. But they are recognized. Joseph treats them like the strangers they had become and with hard words as befits their transgressions.

He remembers his dreams and is now seeing them beginning to unfold. So, this is not revenge. This is a wise and godly man knowing the hard sinfulness of these men, his brothers. Two have blood of a whole city and its environs on their hands. One has attempted to usurp his father’s authority by sleeping with his father’s concubine. One has refused to fully carry out his responsibility as a father-in-law, then had slept with his daughter-in-law thinking he was going in to a cult prostitute. All but one had intended to slaughter a brother and instead, had sold him into slavery. The sword of Joseph’s sharp words is intended to pierce calloused and hardened hearts.

He accuses them of being spies. They are here pretending to buy food. But they have actually come to see the affect the famine is having on Egypt. He knows this is not true. But he is moving to see what they will say.
The Protests of their Innocence (v.10-11)
Listen to their words. Hear the shock. Sense the fear. Can’t you see them pressing their faces ever harder into the ground? What does this Egyptian know? Why would he say such a thing? They are not spies. They are just brothers from Canaan. We have come to buy food. We are honest men.

The Test of their Statements (v.12-17)
Of all the things these brothers may be, they are not honest men. Joseph knows this. So, he again asserts his allegation. As if to prove their innocence, they fill in more details. They are from a family of twelve brothers. One has been left at home. One is no more – ah, what irony that the brother that is no more is the very one standing before them.

Joseph is probing their character while he is proving their story. If they are who they say they are, then send one of them back home and bring this little brother back to Egypt. If they can do this, then he will accept their story. Joseph well knows that Benjamin is not among them because of Jacob’s fear that something will happen to him. What are these brothers going to do? He knows Jacob will never send Benjamin. And who to send that will have creditability when he returns and tries to tell Jacob what has happened?

He then puts them in custody for three days. Surely this is in the very same prison he was incarcerated in. Wonder what they are thinking? Can’t you just hear the fearful whispering? What an awful situation they are in.

TheirAwakenedConsciences (v.18-25)
Three days they wait. Maybe they are going to die. What will they propose if the Egyptian leader insists on what he has demanded?

The Probing of their Hearts (v.18-20)
Joseph meets with them and probes their heart deeply. He does so first by a startling announcement. Because he fears God he is going to change what he has commanded. This is stunning. He does not just fear “the gods”. He is not a religious or superstitious man. He is a man who fears Elohim. He, the Egyptian lord who stands before them as a God-fearer. What astonishment had to rush through their hearts! How would he even know, much less fear the God of Abraham, Isaac and their father? What humbling because in all their protests of innocence and honesty, they have never invoked the name or character of the God this Egyptian knows and reverences.

He also probes their heart by seeing what they will do with a different demand. They can live, load their caravan with grain and go home to their father – all but one. They must leave one of the brothers as a hostage, if you will. He will be the surety, the guarantee that they will return and when they do, they must bring the younger brother with them. As one who fears God, he will not be responsible for the death of the brothers nor the starvation of the whole household. But will they leave one of their number in Egypt. You bet they will (v.20b).
The Stirring of their Guilt (v.21-22)

Ah, the voice of Joseph’s pleas so many long years ago are still ringing in their ears. They would not listen to the distress of his soul; now, they must endure the distress of this situation. They see this as a punishment – they draw a direct line from their sin to this trouble. Joseph had begged them to let him go with many pitiful cries. They would not listen. Who is going to listen to their cries for mercy?

Reuben steps forward to pound the nails home. This may be self-justification. More likely, it is vain regret. Hadn’t he told them not to sin against Joseph? Hadn’t they not listened to his voice of reason and right? Now, it is time to pay. Now is the reckoning. They will know now by personal experience the terrible price of justice.

The Binding of their Brother (v.23-25)

Joseph understands what they have been saying. They had been speaking through an interpreter. What a shock it would have been if they had known that their regret and recriminations were plainly heard and understood. Joseph left the room and wept. He has known these long years of pain and suffering, yet has remained faithful to God and tender toward others. And now, they have not only bowed their heads to the younger brother, but they appear to be beginning to bow their hearts to the Lord.

But, he will carry through with his plan. He takes Simeon out of the group and then, with an evocative reminder, he binds him up and takes him away. He orders that their bags be loaded with grain and when they are not looking, their money as well. In a final act of faithfulness and tenderness, he provisions for their journey home.

Their Troubling Concerns (v.26-33)

I am sure their hearts were heavy with many troubling concerns. What would father say? Will Reuben be OK? What are we going to do if we have to return? Who was that Egyptian anyway? Should we not fear the Lord as he does?

Their Disturbing Discovery (v.26-28)

Well, the first evening stop came. They prepared to feed the donkeys. One of the brothers opened the bag of grain and there was his bag of money! He ran to his brothers, trembling with fear. If this is discovered, they will be accused of being thieves as well as spies. They know the mighty hand of the sovereign God is against them. They are afraid and well they might be.

Their Faithful Report (v.29-34)

When they arrived at home, they tell Jacob all that has happened. Now, most of us would be tempted to shade the story some way. But they faithfully rehearse what has happened, yet don’t highlight the trouble Simeon is really in. This is evidence of repentance. The last time the brothers were in front of Jacob, they
had been carrying a bloody robe and telling an awful lie. Now, they are telling the truth.

**Their Father’s Distress**  
**(v.35-38)**

So, they begin to empty their sacks. Out pours the grain. Out thumps the bundles of money. What a shock! They had not checked all the rest of the bags. Every single bag of grain had its bundle of money wrapped in it. Do they remember the 30 pieces of silver they got as a brother’s price?

Then the piercing words of a father’s grief and accusation. He has lost his children. Joseph is no more. Simeon is no more. And now they want to take Benjamin away. But Reuben steps up in what appears to us to be a foolish promise and pledge. “Dad, I will take responsibility for Benjamin. If we don’t bring him back, then you can kill my two sons.” Well of course. This is just going to bring peace to Jacob’s heart.

But Jacob will have none of it. They are not going to take Benjamin down to Egypt under any circumstances. Jacob is basically consigning Simeon to his fate. They had better hope the famine does not hold. Otherwise, a very hard decision is just a few bags of grain away.

**Lessons**

In conclusion, consider two important things that Kent Hughes is so helpful on this text.

“Joseph’s brothers were wracked with guilt that, in the context of the Bible, put them in the way of grace. This was good guilt, healthy guilt, graced guilt. Without guilt there could be no forgiveness and no resolution. And without guilt they could never assume their covenant mantles.” [Hughes, *Genesis*, p.497]

So we see the movement of God’s grace to break hardened sinners and bring them to repentance. There is guilt, fear and sorrow. There is an awareness of sin and guilt before God. There is fear over judgment and consequence. And there is deep heart grief and sorrow over the offense against God and others. These graces then overflow in the grace of repentance.

As you come to know your Bible better and walk with God more, you may be wrestling with guilt. This is a good thing. This is a grace. When we sin and sense guilt, feel accusing of God in our consciences, this is the very grace of God to us. Do not reject it. Do not drown it. Do not deny it. Acknowledge your guilt and the sin it is accusing you of. Confess your sin to the Lord and those you have directly sinned against. Turn away from your sin. Then, forgiven, your guilt will be turned to gladness.

So, may I ask a blessing on all of you this morning:

May God grace you with guilt over your sins, with sorrow and with fear so that you will turn to your Redeemer and find forgiveness of sin, freedom from sin and fullness of joy.
Troubled Souls in Testing Trials
Genesis 42
Twice Tested
Genesis 43-44

Introduction

Many people hated school, not because of the learning, but because of the testing. Regular quizzes and exams are the de rigueur of a good education. A good test exposes a familiarity with facts and a facility in applying them. It is an opportunity to remember and reason. Sometimes, testing is different. When I was coaching, I regularly tested players. We ran them through mental drills designed to test their ability to withstand relentless pressure. We put them through combination drills and small game competition that exposed skill weaknesses or unwillingness to play both sides of the ball. And sometimes, we tested to see whether individuals were developing as a team. Would small jealousies and jockeying for favor, starting positions and even public acclaim come to surface when loyalty to the cause of the team was paramount.

This is the sort of testing we often face from God through trials. This is the kind of testing Joseph will put his brothers through. It is intended, through trials and unexpected providences, to expose their hearts, what they truly believe and deeply want. The brothers are tested for jealousy and fidelity. Will they be jealous of Benjamin and the favor shown him? Will they allow him to be taken away, or will Judah keep his word and stand up from his brother?

Much of these chapters are a studied contrast to the chapter 42. Joseph greets them differently, treats them differently, the brothers respond differently. Joseph is tender, solicitous, and congenial. The brothers are humble, curious, hesitant, and surprised at their treatment.

But these two chapters are not about judgment. They are about how mercy transforms. Through Joseph, a severe mercy is extended and radical transformation takes place. But all this is aimed at reconciliation and restoration.

Reconciliation without righteousness is a sham. Joseph well knows that to be truly reunited with his brothers, they need to have dealt with their sins. He is a good position to expose their hearts and see if they have truly changed. These two chapters tell of these sons of Jacob being twice tested.
Chapter 43

The Testing of their Jealousy

Their deep jealousy of Joseph had caused them to plan to kill him and eventually to sell him into slavery. This first test is designed to see if they will be jealous of another little brother’s being favored.

Through the Preparation for the Journey (43:1-14)

The sovereign Lord is working to bring the boys back to Egypt.

The Difficult Struggle over Returning (v.1-7)

The sacks of grain that sustained them after the first journey are slowly disappearing. The famine is intensifying. A decision to return to Egypt for food is pressing on them. But Jacob and his sons are all aware that in order to return, the youngest, Benjamin, will have to go as well. Jacob does not want him to go. Benjamin has now taken Joseph’s place in Jacob’s idolatrous, self-centered heart.

The Noble Pledge for Safety (v.8-10)

Judah then stands to ensure the safety of Benjamin. He will bear the blame. He will pledge for the sake of the boy. There is also a sense of impatience with his father’s self-focus and child-centeredness. In the time it finally took to get his dad to agree, they could have made the journey twice. So, this has not been a simple one-time conversation, but a long discussion as hunger looms near.

The Ample Provision under Mercy (v.11-14)

Jacob resigns himself to the inevitable. So he loads up his sons with expensive nuts and spices. He sends twice the amount of money. He prepares the sons to pay back the money that had been put in their bags on the last trip. He is reconciled to sending Benjamin, if necessary, to his death.

In the Summons before Joseph (43:15-25)

They load their provisions and head down to Egypt. They report to stand before Joseph.

Their Call to the House (v.15-17)

When Joseph sees that Benjamin has come, he sends his steward to prepare a feast. He plans it for his own home, not in the public places. Through the steward, he summons them to his home to meet with him in private.

Their Fear for the Motivation (v.18-22)

O, can you just smell their fear? They are both baffled and frightened. Among themselves they speculate that this Egyptian ruler is going to exact his revenge over the money. O, if they only knew who this was and the cause for true justice and revenge that could have lurked in his heart. So they go to the steward to try to explain what had happened and that they are prepared to make amends.
Their Assurances from the Steward (v.23)
But the steward has his instructions. He knows that they are heading, not toward something to fear but to a feast. The only slaughter today would be the beef for the table. He tells them not to be afraid. He then attributes the appearing of their money to the God he serves. Ah, the Egyptian lord who fears and serves Yahweh has instructed his household in the ways of the Lord and seems to have brought even this steward to faith in the God of the Bible.

Their Preparations for the Meal (v.24-25)
They seem to take him at his word. They settle in, taking care of their livestock. They wash and prepare themselves for a meal. What relief and joy when Simeon appears, unarméd. Things are really looking up. They are going to be dining with royalty.

With the Companionship around the Table (43:26-34)
The day wanes on and Joseph arrives home from his work.

The Assurances by his Greeting (v.26-28)
He meets with his guests and assures them in a kind and familial greeting. He inquires about their father. He is a kind and genial host. You can almost see them beginning to relax.

The Compassion for his Brother (v.29-30)
Then he sees Benjamin. Ah, his closest brother! He greets him and then seems to remember and addresses him as “son”. But, his heart is warmed to his brother. He has to hurry out to another room. There he weeps.

The Strangeness of his Setting (v.31-34)
When he returns, they prepare to serve the meal. In typical Egyptian fashion, Joseph does not sit with Hebrews. This was an abomination, partly because they are not Egyptian but also because they are shepherds. Shepherds were a dirty, low class of people, an abomination (Gen. 46:34) not worthy to sit at table with the hightborn.

To their amazement, they are given a seating order. The place of honor and authority was given to the oldest according to his birthright. Around the table they went, according to age with the youngest Benjamin at the expected place. They cannot help but notice. But they don’t know what to make of it. So they sit down and are ready to eat. The chargers of food are brought to Joseph’s table. The portions are served onto the plates. They watch as 5 times the amount is taken to Benjamin. Ah, but there is no jealousy. There are no green eyes among them. All is quiet and well in their souls. They eat and drink and make merry with him. They are happy together. They are just glad for what they are receiving.
The Testing of their Fidelity

Jealousy had ridden the hearts of these men into selling their brother. Along with that had been a deep loss of loyalty and fidelity. They failed to fear God, to understand their responsibility to their family and hard heartedly dishonored and wounded their father. Will they, given the right circumstances, do so again?

By the Accusation against the Brothers (44:1-17)

So Joseph builds upon the testing device he has already used.

The Framing of Benjamin (v.1-2)

Joseph tells his steward to prepare the brother’s sacks of grain, loading them down with as much as they can possibly carry. Then he is to return their money bags, on in each sack of grain. In Benjamin’s sack, he is to put his prized personal serving cup.

The Confrontation by the Steward (v.3-13)

As the morning dawns, the brothers all load up and begin to head out. You can well imagine their joy at being reunited, their wonder at the dinner and all of them together headed home to father. But they have not ridden far out of town when chasing hard behind them, up gallops the Egyptian lord’s steward.

Standing there he feigns anger. Trembling, he charges them with returning the Egyptian lord’s good favor with the evil of stealing his prized and personal silver cup. This cup is said to be how he practices divination. He is now giving the brothers a pagan explanation for how he knew their birth order and the favored status of Benjamin. He is not only accusing them of theft of a valuable silver cup, but also of religious apostasy in that they are taking his magic talisman.

Ah, they are shocked. Listen, the shifting winds of Egypt are buffeting them terribly. First accused as spies, imprisoned, a hostage taken and then sent home with a dire warning for their return. Then, when they return, ready to make full amends, with Benjamin in two they are treated to a special dinner where the Egyptian seems to know more than he should. Now, they are accused of what would be unthinkable. Why would they steal a single gold or silver trinket when they had come, not only with money and spices to buy what they needed now, but also to reimburse what had somehow found its way into their bags on the last trip?

Then, with their usual foolish overstatement (and aren’t we, under the same sort of duress, prone to the same sort of response) they say that this is so impossible and so unthinkable that the steward can search all their belongings. If he finds the cup in anyone’s belongings, then that one can be put to death and all the rest will return to be slaves.

The steward responds with better reasoned justice. If it is found, then that one will be accused, bound and brought to servitude and the rest will be innocent. What an evocative sentence. They cannot help but remember a day long ago when one of them, innocent of any wrong, was bound and sent to Egypt. So the search begins. You can almost feel the drama rising. The steward is no
fool. He knows exactly where it is and that it will be found. To help his master press home the test, he starts with the eldest and works his way down. Sack after sack is opened with the what! The bag of money is in the sacks as before. Now, instead of growing relief there has to be growing consternation until Benjamin’s sack is opened and behold, there is the cup.

Every one of them is grieved. They tear their clothes. They load their donkeys. They do not abandon Benjamin to his fate. They all head back to the city. That, I am sure, was a long and silent and dreadful ride.

**The Accusation by Joseph**

(v.14-17)

Joseph is awaiting them in his house. They come in before him and throw themselves at his feet. They cannot understand what is happening. They have no way to clear themselves. But this is not Joseph’s supposed divination, this is God exposing the guilt of the brothers. They understand that. Further, they are willing to submit, all of them to that.

But no, Joseph will have none of that. He is going to release all but Benjamin. What will they do? Will they look to their own escape and leave a brother behind to be enslaved just as long ago they sent a brother into slavery? Will they forsake their word, their obligation, their family loyalty and heavenly fidelity? Will they be willing to wound their father once again?

In other words, are these brothers truly repentant? Are they jealous of Benjamin – here is a convenient way to be rid of him. Are they loyal to God – here is a convenient way out of their dilemma. Or are they committed in their hearts to obedience to God in such a way that they will stand up for Benjamin and seek a way to return him home and not wound their father again?

**In The Appeal from Judah**

(44:18-34)

Ah, Judah has given his word to his father. Now he will make his appeal to the Egyptian lord. In a stunning reversal of heroes, Judah now stands to become the center of the story.

**The Love for His Father**

(v.18-29)

These two paragraphs are a rehearsal of what has happened. They are the events of these two chapters through Judah’s eyes. These now are repentant, God-fearing, father loving, brother defending eyes. The point of this familiar narrative is to highlight their loyalty and love for their father. It matters to them that he is old, infirm and vulnerable. It matters to them that he loves Benjamin fiercely. It matters to them that they have brought much grief in what they did to their other brother. It matters to them that this will kill their aged father. There is no jealousy here. There is no disloyalty here.

**The Substitution for his Brother**

(v.30-34)

O, the great gospel heart of the Bible shines in Judah’s words. He will take his brother’s place. He will be a substitute. For the sake of his father and the safety of his little brother, he will take his place in punishment. He will fulfill his covenant. He will keep his word. He will leave the place of position and
prosperity. He will become a servant in Egypt. He will, if necessary, give his life for the life of his brother.

So here is Judah, the tribe from which the kings of Israel and the great Ruler and Redeemer will come. As a shadow of the greater to come, he takes the place of the accused, fulfills the justice required all for the good of little brother and the love of his father.

O, see our Redeemer – see Him standing in our place. See Him bearing our punishment. See Him willing to come to the world and die in our place. See Him dying and raised again, all for the good of little brothers and the love of His father. See Him one day gathering all the Benjamin’s who have trusted His Name and bowed to His rule around Him bringing them safely home.

Soli Deo Gloria – Amen.
Repentance and Reunion
Genesis 45:1-46:27

Introduction
Broken family relationships are difficult and painful. Arguments, differences and sometimes divisions wreck havoc on family peace. When these come as a result of distance or differences in lifestyle, they are easier and more understandable. But when these are the result of jealousy, anger, jockeying for power, position and privilege – when they come as a result of sin and being sinned against, resolution sometimes seems almost impossible.

Many of you experience what I am talking about. You know relatives that you just hate to see at family reunions. It is awkward if not outright hostile. Some of you have been terribly sinned against by family with all the hurt, pain and division that comes with it.

But imagine the story we have been following in Genesis. Has there ever been such awful pain? Has there such a grand reversal in personal fortune? Has there ever been such an opportunity to take revenge or at least exact the pound of flesh? Has a family faced such an awful and awesome moment as this?

Many television shows now have plots so complicated that the first few minutes of each show go back to do quick snapshots to set this week’s scene. The engaging drama that has been unfolding for us in the Joseph narratives is like that. Where are we today in this story when the narrative opens with a great Egyptian lord standing before 11 brothers one of whom is in front of the others, arms outstretched in a beseeching posture?

These are all brothers, sons of the Patriarch Jacob. They had, many long years ago, sold their brother into slavery out of jealousy and hatred. Through much travail and in the providence of God, this slave has now become the second most powerful man in Egypt. He controls vast stores of food set aside during 7 years of great harvests for the now unfolding 7 years of dire famine. His brothers came to Egypt the first time to get food. He recognized them; but they did not know him. He tested them by taking one brother hostage, sending the others home and warning them that if they came, they must bring their youngest brother, the prize of their father’s heart, with them.

The famine has deepened all across the mid-east. So the father, Jacob, sends the brothers back, finally agreeing to send the youngest, Benjamin. Joseph, their brother and Egyptian leader, honors them with a banquet, loads them up and sends them home returning the hostage brother to them. But, he has again returned their money in their grain bags and had his steward hide his silver cup in Benjamin’s bag. The steward is sent after them, finds the cup and now they are in fear of their lives before this powerful man. The brothers are repentant, contrite and transformed. Judah, from whom the future kings and the great King Jesus will one day come, now offers to be the substitute and take the punishment for Benjamin.

And so our story continues…
Reconciliation: the Progress of Souls (45:1-28)

There he stands, open arms, great hearted, the shadow of our Lord Jesus willing to die for the safety of his little brother and the sake of his beloved father.

From a Startling Confession (v.1-3)

And Joseph can contain himself no longer. He sends all the Egyptian attendants away. Alone with his brothers, weeps and cries so loud he is heard all over the palace. Sobbing he makes a startling revelation, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?”

Moses, with droll understatement records two things: the brothers are dumb-founded and dismayed. Ah, this is high drama. They are shocked into stunned silence. They don’t know what to say. They are dismayed. There has to be fear and wonderment. You can almost hear the, “O, no!” in their heads. Not in their worst dreams could they have imagined themselves being so utterly vulnerable and exposed to the one they had so mightily wronged and sinned against.

With a Humble Reunion (v.4-15)

But Joseph moves in reconciliation. He invites them to approach him. He moves toward them in love and mercy calling on them to respond to him with repentance and love. In the midst of real fault, offense and sin, Joseph lovingly instructs them to move toward him in a humble reunion.

The elements of that reconciled reunion are very important.

There is an admission of the reality of sin (v.4). He is their brother and the one they did sell. There is no minimizing or denying their sin. It was real. It is not even being overlooked. It has been forgiven.

There is true repentance not vain regret (v.5). Two impotent emotions are addressed here, distress and self-anger. These are futile at this point. They can mar the reconciliation and can become a denial of having been forgiven. When forgiven, do not hold the account against yourself when the offended person is not, having forgiven you. Experience the joy of having been forgiven.

There is an acknowledgement of the purposes and providences of God (v.6-8). We acknowledge our sin. We acknowledge the hand of God. He is at work. He sent Joseph to Egypt through the brother’s sin and elevated him to the Vice-Regency so that he could take care of his family. It is a great mercy and encouragement when we begin to see some of what God is doing in every circumstance. It is a wonderful heart shaping truth and affection sending certainty when being reconciled to those who have sinned against us.

There are practical deeds of loving care within his power (v.9-11). Joseph will take care of them. He will bring them down, set aside a place, provide for their welfare and see that they do not come to poverty. These are great deeds of sacrificial love attendant to a forgiving heart.

There are personal expressions of affirmation and affection (v.12-15). Changed hearts are overflowing will experiences and expressions of affec-
tion. This is not a cold and calculated attempt to restore an undesirable relationship. This is warm and full. Here are tears and hugs and upsurges of trust.

**In a Generous Proposition** (v.16-20)

The noise of this great reunion reached the ears of the Pharaoh. He and all his servants are glad to hear that the family is being reunited. So he makes a generous offer and proposes that Joseph bring his whole family down to live in Egypt. He will provide the wagons for transport. He will make provisions for the journey. And he will ensure their prosperity wherever they settle in the land. God’s power is at work in the heart of this pagan ruler so that he will rejoice in the good of his servants.

**By a Gracious Direction** (v.21-28)

So Joseph instructs his brothers to go and bring the clan down. He takes all that the Pharaoh has provided and gives it to them. He loads them up. He ensures that they are provided for the whole round trip. And then, knowing them as he does, he reminds them not to quarrel on the way.

What news they have as they arrive home. “Father, Joseph is alive. I know this is hard to believe, but he is the ruler over all of Egypt.” In an interesting turn of phrase, his heart is numbed because he does not believe them. He is suspicious. He is doubtful. It is impossible.

But then they tell the story Joseph had related. They tell of the fulfillment of God’s purposes and promises. They surely acknowledge their own fault. And they bring their skeptical father out to see all that Joseph through the Pharaoh’s beneficence had sent. Surely the Pharaoh’s standards are emblazoned on the wagons. There are all the provisions. Could it be true? Yes it is! His heart is revived. He stirs himself up. He rises up out of his being downcast and self-focused. Hope surges and satisfaction settles. He is complete. He is ready to see the end of life if he can be granted the sight of his son.


So preparation is made. The wagons are loaded. The tents are struck. All the family goods and persons and livestock are gathered in a long train. The tribe begins its long trek down to Egypt where, over the next four hundred years, they will become a nation.

**By a Divine Assurance** (v.1-4)

On their journey, they travel through Beersheba and stop there for a night. In gratitude and worship to God, Israel (note the change in his name) offers sacrifices to the Lord. But his heart is trembling. This is still a hard journey. His son is in Egypt. But to go there he must leave the Promised Land. In doing so, is he moving away from the God of the Covenant?

God appears to Israel (Jacob) to assure him that this too is in His plan and purposes. Israel is not to be afraid to go to Egypt. Their God will shelter them during the rising tide of Canaanite wickedness and depravity. There God will protect
them so that they may increase in number and become a nation. There God will
prosper them so that when they depart they will be rich. But most important of
all, he can do down because God is going with him. God will bring him up again.
And what a sweet phrase – the gentle hand of much loved son will tenderly close
his eyes upon his death.

**Upon a Grand Arrival** *(v.5-7)*

With God’s assurance, Jacob arises in the morning and travels with confidence
down into Egypt. What a grand caravan this is. All these souls preserved alive.
All the pain and trouble and suffering washed away as Joseph stands in the bul-
warks of the Egyptian capital and watches the grand arrival. Suddenly, breaking
out ahead, rides Judah. Joseph runs down to meet him. Judah will lead them to
Goshen and Joseph will meet them there *(v.28).*

**With a Significant Enumeration** *(v.8-26)*

All of Jacob’s sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters arrive in Egypt
with him. It is a great procession of souls. To ensure that the census is true and
accurate, Moses lists by name and enumerates by number all those who went
down into Egypt.

For the sake of our time and my tongue, we will not read this list. But this listing
of seventy people arriving in Egypt is significant. Moses alludes to this in both
Exodus 1:5 and Deuteronomy 10:22. The number seventy is important. Earlier in
Genesis, the table of the nations enumerates seventy nations *(Genesis 10-11).*
From one, Noah, had come the many, seventy nations. From the many, seventy
persons, would come the one, the nation of Israel. Under the New Covenant, in
the one, the New Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ, many from all the nations will be
gathered the reconciled and restored.
Lessons

The sending of Israel down into Egypt sets up the great story of the Exodus. Israel will come up out of Egypt and move towards the land promised. But that will be a shadow of the new Israel, the Lord Jesus, who will one day go down into Egypt for safety and will come up out of Egypt the true Israel, the son of God. In the Exodus is the great story of our own coming up out of the world, the realm of sin and our journey through to the land of promise, the new heavens and new earth.

Much shallowness in modern Christianity comes because we are ignorant of or even deny the graces in conversion. The movement of our souls toward God is in this narrative.

There is an open disclosure to our souls of who God is and our true relationship to Him. He shows Himself to our souls in His Word and we see by faith.

There is a deep awareness of our own sinfulness and guilt before the Lord. In that light we understand and feel, we are sensible of our visibility and vulnerability before our God. We know the deep reality of our sin – we do not deny it, diminish it or dress it. It is plain and painful in our hearts.

There is a movement by God who initiates our reconciliation and welcomes us based on His forgiveness. He moves toward us in mercy and we, in response, draw near His throne of grace.

There are great assurances in our souls that we have peace with God. Through words and deeds, God speaks His peace and shows our union with Him. We acknowledge the mighty movements of His grace and the weaving of His purposes.

Finally, there are experiences and expressions of the reality of a restored relationship. We come under His father tutelage, His parental care. We receive His good provisions and gifts. We are guided by His heavenly wisdom. And we are all brought safely home with all the family and all we need.

Here are the characteristics and aims of true repentance and reconciliation:

*AN ADMISSION OF THE REALITY OF SIN.* We will be reconciled when sin is acknowledged and addressed.

*TRUE REPENTANCE NOT VAIN REGRET.* We will reject self-focused emotions and enter into the joy of forgiveness.

*AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE PURPOSES AND PROVIDENCES OF GOD.* We will gladly bow under the hand of a sovereign God moving for our good and His glory.

*PRACTICAL DEEDS OF LOVING CARE WITHIN OUR POWER.* We will do deeds of sacrificial love attendant to a forgiving heart.

*PERSONAL EXPRESSIONS OF AFFIRMATION AND AFFECTION.* We will engage one another with real affection and affirmation.

Why? Because our Redeemer and Ruler has reconciled us and restored us just like this! To Him be all the glory.
Notes

Included in the account of the move to Egypt is a listing of Jacob's descendants. In verse 26 the number of descendants is said to be 66, whereas the number in verse 27 is 70. The first number represents those who traveled with Jacob to Egypt, and the second number includes the children and grandchildren already in Egypt. The following tabulation shows how these two figures are determined:

Leah’s children and grandchildren (v. 15) 33
Zilpah’s children and grandchildren (v. 18) 16
Rachel’s children and grandchildren (v. 22) 14
Bilhah’s children and grandchildren (v. 25) 7

Dinah (v. 15) + 1

71

Er and Onan (who died in Canaan; v. 12); Joseph and his two sons, already in Egypt (v. 20)

66

Those who went to Egypt with Jacob (v. 26) + 4

70

Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, Jacob (v. 27)

It is from these 70 (which included Joseph’s two sons born in Egypt, vv. 20, 27; cf. 41:50-52) that the nation of Israel would grow.

Chronology of the Patriarchs

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Abraham was born (at age 75; Gen. 21:5)

Isaac was born (at age 100; Gen. 21:5)

Jacob was born (at age 130; Gen. 37:9)

Joseph was born (at age 17; Gen. 37:26)

Jacob died (at age 147, 17 years after he moved to Egypt; Gen. 47:29)

Joseph died (at age 110, Gen. 50:26; therefore he was born in 1515)


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Protection and Provision
Genesis 47

*Introduction*

John Adams is one of the revered and respected fathers of our nation. His greatest biographer, David McCullough, has given us the story of this sacrificial, saintly man. Much of what I am going to say is taken from a talk McCullough gave at Hillsdale College and is taken from *Imprimis*, May 2006, a Hillsdale College Publication.

John Adams was born a poor farm boy. He entered Harvard at 15. He set himself to read “forever”. He was a deeply devoted Christian. The correspondence between him and his beloved wife, Abigail, are some of the most amazing letters ever written. He served our country well. He sacrificed often for its advancement. He argued for the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. He chose Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence. He appointed Washington as head of the army. He appointed John Marshall as Chief Justice.

As he retired from public service, he met with heartache and hardship. He suffered terribly with physical ailments. His wife and daughter both died in the same season of the year. He was abandoned, forgotten and even vilified. Let me now give you the “feel of his fiber” by McCullough.

One of the few things that Adams had left that he adored in his last years were his fruit trees. But then came one March night a terrible ice storm, and he woke up the next morning to see all of his trees shattered. This could have broken him, but it didn’t. Listen to what he wrote:

A rain had fallen from some warmer region in the skies when the cold here below was intense to an extreme. Every drop was frozen wherever it fell in the trees, and clung to the limbs and sprigs as if it had been fastened by hooks of steel. The earth was never more universally covered with snow, and the rain had frozen upon a crust on the surface which shone with the brightness of burnished silver. The icicles on every sprig glowed in all the luster of diamonds. Every tree was a chandelier of cut glass. I have seen a queen of France with 18 millions of livres of diamonds upon her person and I declare that all the charms of her face and figure added to all the glitter of her jewels did not make an impression on me equal to that presented by every shrub. The whole world was glittering with precious stones.

Adams died, as many of you know, the same day Jefferson died. Jefferson had been his closest friend, then his political rival, then his political enemy. After twelve years of neither speaking to each other, Adams initiated the first letter of what was to be one of the great reconciliations in our history. The correspondence between these former presidents lasted until their deaths, and is some of the most wonderful letters in the English language. And then they died on the same day, each in his own bed, surrounded by his books. And it wasn’t just any day. It was the 4th of July, 50 years after the Declaration of Independence.
The movement of God’s purposes has been constantly forward even through tremendous obstacles. We have seen it in the life of John Adams. We have seen it week after week through Genesis. Just when it seems hopeless, God moves with his power to fulfill what He has promised. So, now, at this moment, God’s people have left the Promised Land in the midst of a terrible famine and seem to be settling into Egypt. How is this a good thing? Abraham had come back to Egypt during famine with disastrous consequence for his reputation. His son, Isaac had done the same. Yet, in Egypt God has chosen to enrich and prosper them both.

This is the constant dilemma for God’s people living in exile away from our homeland in heaven. Obstacle after obstacle seems to arise. Just when we seem to making a great advance, some setback brings us up short. This besets our personal lives and our lives together as God’s people. I know that we hoped much to have a new facility by now with greater advantage for ministry and opportunity for outreach. I know that some of you have experienced financial or health reversals when you hoped for further progress.

How will we respond to all this? Does God keep His promises? How do His providences unfold? Do we become fatalists just shrugging our spiritual shoulders at whatever comes to pass? Is there a way to be submissive to God’s providences while still engaged in the world around us with wisdom, confidence and deft spiritual balance? I believe so. I believe this is precisely the question, the dilemma Moses is dealing with here for the sake of all who hear and heed what he says.

**The Interaction with a Pagan King (v.1-18)**

One of the great challenges facing the leadership of God’s people is how to interact with pagans in authority. Joseph is the second in command in Egypt. But he still must engage the Pharaoh in seeking a place and protection for his own people.

In this unit, Moses highlights the wisdom of Joseph who models how to engage pagan people as God’s kind of man. Here the providence of God has brought the son of Israel to have first place in the pagan world as he supplies them bread and brings them to servitude under an earthly king. Joseph’s admirable faithfulness and diligence have brought him to positions of leadership where ever he has been. But we have not been told how. Now we see how Joseph’s leadership functioned.

**In the Procuring of His Favor (v.1-6)**

Joseph presents himself before the Pharaoh. He carefully announces the arrival of his brothers and his father with all they have and own. As he had asked earlier, he has settled them in the land of Goshen. Joseph wants to ensure that this is not just a temporary situation. He is going to secure this part of Egypt as a permanent portion as long as they dwell there.

Joseph also chooses five of his brothers to bring before the Pharaoh. We are not told the reasons for choosing only five. But it is a conscious act both in how many he chooses and in the ones he chooses. This is a bit of “putting your best foot forward.” However, the idea here is not appear in a way that encourages a compromising mingling with the Egyptians, but rather highlights the desirability of separateness.
There are two challenges here then. They are going to need space and identity. They must have space for their present flocks and future prosperity. They must also be able to maintain their uniqueness as God’s people. They must live in Egypt without becoming Egyptian. They will want to pursue their vocation under God and continue to grow and multiply as God’s people. Their challenge is like ours. We must live here in this world. But we must not become a part of the world. We must learn to live in and engage with the world without being poured into its mold. Israel prospered and maintained her identity. But the wilderness wanderings are full of how much Egypt had gotten in God’s people while God’s people were in Egypt. This is what all God’s heart work in hard providences is all about. It is the uprooting of Egypt from our hearts so that we will love God and neighbor.

So, Pharaoh asks the obvious question men ask of each other all through time and all over the world, “What do you do for a living?” Based on their occupation as shepherds (which the Egyptians despised), they ask for the separate land where they are now pastured called Goshen. The Pharaoh offers them any land they want and is glad for them to take the land they request. Recognizing their abilities, the Pharaoh even turns over his flocks and herds to their care.

In the Presenting of His Father  (v.7-18)

Joseph then brings in his father to present him to Pharaoh. Surely he has told the Pharaoh stories of his family and father. Given all the Pharaoh seems to know about God, Joseph has related this family history to God’s promises and provisions. So here is the grand patriarch of this great tribe. Here is the man to whom God had affirmed the covenant and through whom God would bring about the 12 tribes. He stands before this pagan ruler and he conveys a blessing upon the Pharaoh. This is not just a greeting. This is God’s man, the covenant head of the future messiah and father of a nation. The Pharaoh may be the one upon the throne, but nevertheless, the greater is blessing the lesser.

The Pharaoh asks him how old he is. Ah, he is 130 years old. Further, Jacob responds with by apparently complaining of his lot in life. Compared to his forefathers, his life has been relatively short. And all his days have been full of hardship, grief and evil. It is hard to be kind to Jacob at this point. Here, I believe, he succumbs to one of the sins of old age – the troubles of the past are magnified and the blessings of the present are minimized. Here is an opportunity to exalt God, to show in the midst of the hardness of life, the amazing and unforeseen greatness of what God has done. But no, all he can say is that he has lived 130 years and it has been really tough. May God give us the grace in the senior years of life to be seasoned with spiritual joy and hope even in the midst of physical decline.

Just a brief note – Jacob giving his age here also helps with establishing a timeline to Adam. Here is another milestone, among others, that mark the years from Noah’s flood through Abraham’s call to Israel’s leaving at the Exodus.

The closing of this day sees Joseph busily settling everyone in, providing for their needs and making all at home. His careful faithfulness and wisdom has secured a great place for his people and all with the favor and smile of the Pharaoh.
The Provision for a Pagan People (v.19-26)
We have seen how Joseph brought his needs and requests to the pagan ruler. Now we see how he implemented a program for distributing the stockpiled food.

In the Selling of the Larder/Largesse (v.13-18)
The Egyptian people begin to run out of their own private stores. So they must come to Joseph to do what the foreigners coming had to do: pay for the grain that he had stockpiled.

First, over a year they spend all their money. Joseph sells them the grain as the famine deepens. He gathers up the money coming in and adds it to the Pharaoh’s wealth. He continues to sell the grain as long as the people have the money to buy it. The effect over the duration of the famine is to move all the currency from general circulation and put it at the disposal of the king.

Once the Egyptian people begin to run out of money, they come to Joseph again for the grain. He makes them an offer. They can trade their livestock for grain. So, for over a year, the Egyptian people buy the grain they need by exchanging their live stock for it. Joseph is accumulating vast wealth and resources for the Pharaoh. Surely, the effect is to impoverish the people. Eventually, this will begin to serve to impoverish the nation.

In the Purchase of the Land (v.19-22)
In accordance with what would later be codified in God’s Law, Joseph sells the food to the Egyptians in exchange for their freedom and their land.

Now for many, this is troubling. Why, given their increasing plight and dire hardship does he simply not give it to them? Leviticus 25:14-43 addresses parallel situations for Israel as they receive God’s law. It was a great act of charity to buy the land of the destitute and bring them on as servants so as to provide for them. The modern welfare system of forcible taking from one group who has in order to freely give to those who don’t have or won’t work is unbiblical and immoral.

We who have grown up under the welfare system have so breathed its air that it is difficult to accept what the Bible clearly says. In the both the Old and New Testaments, the people of God were to care for each other in personal and corporate ways. In the Old Testament, every farmer was to leave the corners of the fields unharvested for the poor to come and glean. But the poor had to come and work for what they received. Never did the Jewish government nor Levitical tax system force the taking of money or harvest from producers in the economy to simply dole out to those who were needy.

Yet, the Bible commands people to love neighbor in such a way that we take care of one another. In Leviticus 25, if a person was so destitute that they had nothing, they could offer themselves and their lands for sell. It was considered a great mercy when someone stepped up to accept the offer. The term of the sale was limited – it could only last until the next Sabbatical year or, by agreement, to the next Jubilee (70th Year). The person could be redeemed by a relative or could redeem themselves if they inherited wealth. What appears
to us to be taking advantage of their plight is in God’s view, an act of charity and compassion.

The New Testament picks up on this: the corporate benevolent care is for God’s people. It is always voluntary. It may be covenanted or promised. Personal, individual charity to neighbors, whether they are believers or not, is also commanded. This reflects God’s way in salvation. The benefits of salvation are freely given by the free-will of God who dispenses His mercy and benevolence as He sees fit. There is no room for demand on our part. We are supplicants who give up all to our King when He gives by grace to we who are utterly depraved, destitute and desperate.

So, the providence of God in bringing the famine and in placing Joseph where he was is being worked out. Part of God’s purpose in the famine was to bring the whole economy under the ownership and control of the Pharaoh. Further, Israel was not subject to this as they owned and grazed their own lands. God had promised to preserve them and to prosper them. Now, he does so in a most surprising places and in most unusual ways.

In the Making of the Law (v.23-26)

Now that the Egyptians had begun to sell their land to the Pharaoh, Joseph proposed a way for them to live on the land and be able to pay the Pharaoh for the privilege. This system we would recognize from history and European feudalism. The local baron or king owns the land. The people live on his lands and farm it. They pay him from what is produced as their rent. They keep the rest for themselves. In this way, the people can sustain themselves at present and in the future. We are not told if Joseph instituted some system of redeeming the land.

So, with the affirmation of the people, Joseph made the statutes permanent. The Pharaoh owned all the land. The people who lived on the land and farmed from the land paid a 20% rent on the produce from the land. Moses is recording this for the sake of the Israelites. They had learned over the 40 years what a hard task master a wicked king is when he has absolute control. They had seen the importance of land to a functioning economy. Having been reminded of all this, they should then welcome the framework and freedom that God’s Law would afford them.

Well, this has been a bit of a tough bit of preaching. But it is important for us to think carefully and Biblically when we make statements about our responsibility to the poor. Hopefully, this morning, you are spurred to take up your Bible and work through some of this for yourself.
The Protection for God’s People  (v.27-31)
This final section highlights how Joseph’s wise administration is a part of God’s good providence.

In the Prosperity of his People  (v.27-28)
In the land they have settled in, they prosper. For 17 years, they gain much in wealth and grow into a great nation. These two verses are the thematic line for the New Covenant. God had sent them down to Egypt. God had protected and prospered them in Egypt. They are away from the Promised Land. But there, they are subject to God’s very great care. Let this be our encouragement, we who are the people of God living away from the Promised Land. We are still under the care of our God. He will protect and He will provide until it is time for the Exodus.

In the Promise to his Father  (v.29-31)
Jacob believes God’s promises. Though he is now living away from the Promised Land, he believes they will return. But he is coming to the end of his life. He does not want to die and have his remains left in Egypt. So he summons Joseph. He makes him promise to bring his body back with them when they return to the Promised Land. This is a great expression of his faith. He both believes the promises of God and is submitted to the providences of God.

Here is a simple and yet very hard lesson for us. We want to believe the promises of God. We can take Him at His Word. But we so often crave different circumstances than God has placed us in. So we must not only believe in Him but must bow to Him. We must do so in a way to looks forward to the future and commits it entirely to His wise and sovereign purposes.
Lessons

Now, what instruction is intended for us upon whom the ends of the ages has come?

Seek the way of wisdom in the midst of God’s providences. Your difficult circumstances are an opportunity to display the glory and greatness of Christ as He gives you wisdom. Make Him look large as you wend your way through the opportunities and obstacles.

Engage pagan or unbelieving (same thing) authorities with careful wisdom, forethought and speech. God’s people of all people should be people-wise. We should not simply assert our rights or make our demands, particularly from the stance of being a Christian.

Grow old with grace. Be becoming a senior saint who serious and joyous. Do not magnify your present troubles nor your past hardships except where and when you can magnify God who is sustaining, yea even better, who is causing you to thrive through them.

Be fierce in your adherence to God’s Word even when it counters the accepted wisdom of the world. We must passionately care for the needy while not violating God’s Word in caring for them. We will find the third way between giving to our own in need and requiring appropriate work in return. For your own study, note how the widows who are taken on for permanent support must have no family to care for them and when they do, they give their days for practical ministry in the church. (See 1 Corinthians 7; 1 Timothy 5; James 1) I do not believe the Bible teaches a welfare system of any sort. I am deeply suspicious of the government’s faith-based initiatives for care for the needy. I am sure in a future series, we will be addressing publicly our understanding of the Bible on these issues and how they impact practical care for the poor.

Let us keep faith with our families. We have miles to go and promises to keep. When we honor our parents by caring for them and providing for them as we can, then God is pleased with us. Give them the honor and support you are commanded while keeping the Lord’s Day as unto Him.
Faith in Mature Saints
Genesis 48-49

Ah, the foibles and follies of old age. A story appeared in an LA paper

An 82-year-old woman received a $114 ticket for taking too long to cross a street. Mayvis Coyle said she began shuffling with her cane across Foothill Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley when the light was green, but was unable to make it to the other side before it turned red.

She said the motorcycle officer who ticketed her on Feb. 15 told her she was obstructing traffic. "I think it's completely outrageous," said Coyle, who described herself as a Cherokee medicine woman. "He treated me like a 6-year-old, like I don't know what I'm doing."

Los Angeles police Sgt. Mike Zaboski of the Valley Traffic Division said police are cracking down on people who improperly cross streets because pedestrian accidents are above normal. He said he could not comment on Coyle's ticket other than to say that it is her word against that of the citing officer, identified only as Officer Kelly.

Councilwoman Wendy Greuel said she has asked transportation officials to figure out how to accommodate elderly people. "We should look at those areas with predominantly seniors and accommodate their needs in intersections" she said.

What a challenge the decline and difficulties of growing old can be. We face the declining years and find ourselves wondering over life. Many struggle with an unfulfilled life – dreams and hopes and expectations withering away. Many struggle with the bitterness the accompanies loss, loneliness and pain. The problems of the past are magnified. The mistakes in life and replayed with vain regret. None of us wants to become a soured saint.

But, what an example a seasoned and stable faith is in the midst of such challenges. When men and women age with grace, they see God ever more, not just in the world they are coming to but also in the world they are leaving. The Bible is richer, God’s truth is more contoured, hardships are accepted and even triumphed in. This is what we all want to aim for, to become a seasoned saint.

As we come to the end of Jacob’s life, we’ve seen how he seems to have struggled with the long hardships of his life and its seeming shortness (even at 130 years old). At a time God has resolved so many of his griefs, he seems to find so little to be glad about. Yet, Moses highlights how in the midst of this, a great blessing is conveyed that was visible even to their day. You see, there is no tribe of Joseph. Among the sons of Jacob who became the tribes of Israel, there is no Joseph. What happened? This text is about what happened. And gloriously, even Jacob begins to show evidence of faith as a mature saint.
Joseph is informed that his father is very ill and is expected to die. So Joseph gathers up his two sons and comes to his father’s home. He waits outside while a servant quietly rouses the old man and tells Joseph is there with two boys. As any father would, he rouses himself and sits up, pulling up his covers and shifting his pillows to be able to sit comfortably and lean on his staff. So Joseph enters to stand by his father’s bed. Jacob looks at them and then begins to exalt the God who has provided for him.

Jacob’s present faith in God recognizes the past promises of God.

**In the Word from God** *(v.3-4)*

God had spoken to Jacob. In a time where there was no written scripture, this was large in the life of the early Old Testament saints. God had given His Word to Jacob. This Word was true and to be believed. In believing it, it was to be acted on as well.

God had confirmed the covenant to Jacob. But in the context of Joseph standing at his bedside, he focuses on the promise of being fruitful and multiplying. In His Word to Jacob, God had affirmed His covenant promise to enlarge his family and bring forth a vast multitude of descendents that would become a great nation. They are on the threshold of the first phase of that promise’s fulfillment.

**In the Kindness of Grace** *(v.5-6)*

Then, in a startling act of kindness and grace arising from faith in God’s Word, Jacob speaks his own promise to Joseph. Rather than pass on the inheritance to Joseph, he would magnify Joseph’s standing by adopting his two sons and then giving each of them a portion among all the brothers. The effect of this is to give Joseph a double portion. But he must be willing to give them up and have them named as Jacob’s sons. The rest of Joseph’s children fathered after these two boys will be Joseph’s own sons in his own name.

**In the Midst of Grief** *(v.7)*

Why does he do this? Because he sees the sons of Joseph as the unexpected provision of God in the midst of a long sadness. Jacob, after all these years, still has an empty place in his heart that Rachel occupied. In the way he phrases this, he sees her as dying while there was still a way to go. He wanted so much for more children by her. But God took her. And now he sees that Joseph’s boys can become the rest of the sons that Rachel never could have.

How often will Israel’s hopes be dashed like Jacob’s on the way to Bethlehem! There will be dark years of trial, testing and hardship. There will be times when it will seem so hard to see that boy that one day will be born in Bethlehem of Ephrath. But faith clings strong to God’s promises and even in the dimming eyesight of old age, the heart sees clearly what God has said. Is it no wonder then that two old people, Simeon and Anna, will rejoice with long and patient waiting faith to see the boy in Bethlehem born.
Acknowledges the Purposes of God (v.8-20)
The faith of mature saints acts to acknowledge the purposes of God. Jacob’s eyes may see the world around him dimly, but his heart sees the heaven above so clearly.

By His Adoption of the Boys (v.8-14)
From the promise to adopt, we now move to the ceremony of adoption itself.

Note first the shift in Jacob’s name. He is not in this Jacob the schemer. He is Israel who strives or engages with God and prevails. So these two boys are going to become a part, not just of Jacob’s family, but also of Israel. They will be enumerated among the tribes.

The adoption ceremony opens with the father asking for the identity of the sons. Because his eyesight is poor, he is confirming the identity of these boys. After all, he has to have plucking on the hem of his conscience that he took advantage of his father’s own blindness to gain the inheritance. So the “Who are these?” is like in a wedding ceremony, “Who presents this woman to be married?” It is a formal and ceremonial identification of the person and their family.

Joseph responds with the confirmation of who they are and a ceremonial presentation of them for adoption. “These are my sons. They are God’s gift to me.” These are the fruit of the covenant God gave to Jacob. These are not Joseph’s to do as he pleases. Both Jacob and Joseph are recognizing the purpose of God to bless Joseph even as his dreams had foretold.

Jacob calls them forward to name them as his own sons by the blessing he conveys upon them. He kisses them and hugs them and peers with dimness and delight into their faces. What a wonderful sentence this is. Jacob’s sad heart moves toward hope. “I never thought I’d see your face again and now God has allowed me to see the faces of your sons.”

Joseph sets the boys down and bows to the earth acknowledging the purposes of God in the adoption of his sons. He stands them formally before Israel so that they can be blessed. Knowing his father’s blindness and possibly lack of familiarity with the boys, he strategically places them with Manasseh on Jacob’s right and Ephraim on his left. Manasseh is his oldest and therefore should be under the right hand of prominence in receiving the blessing from Jacob. Again, this is not manipulation but careful attention to detail knowing the circumstances of his father’s failing eyesight.

But then, in a startling move, Jacob leans toward the boys and crosses his hands. His right hand now is on the head of Ephraim and his left on the head of Manasseh. He knows on whom the main blessing should rest. Just as he, the younger, had been given the blessing over the elder, so he intended and determined to do so with Joseph’s sons.
By His Blessing on the Son  

(v.15-16)

Then he blesses Joseph. I love this! Can you see the scene in your mind’s eye? See Jacob, old, infirm, weak, ill with eyes looking off into eternity. See two young boys standing at his bedside, their father behind them. See Jacob’s arms crossed with his hands on their heads. And hear the blessing of Joseph by Jacob upon these two adopted sons.

In the blessing, Jacob invokes God in three significant ways.

- **HE IS THE GOD BEFORE WHOM HIS ANCESTORS WALKED.** Here is their history with God. Here are covenant promises from God and covenant accountability to Him. He is the God whose purposes and promises are larger than the immediate blessing. He is the God whose purposes are larger than any of them can know.

- **HE IS THE GOD WHO HAS SHEPHERDED JACOB HIS WHOLE LIFE LONG.** This is richer than it seems. Here is a shepherd who sees God as his shepherd in all the richness of what it would have meant to him. God has been his guard and guide, his protector and provider, all his days. Even when he is struggling with sin and its consequences, God has been with him and has brought him safely to this place of blessing. And God is shepherding even in the details of this blessing.

- **HE IS THE ANGEL WHO HAS REDEEMED JACOB FROM EVIL.** Here is wonderful double meaning. He uses a word that at one level means that God has delivered from the evils around him. But the word also means that God has delivered from the evil he is and does. God is deliverer and redeemer. The reference to God as this redeeming angel points back to specific times in his life where the angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, had appeared to him. And it points forward to the coming redeemer who delivers all of God’s people from their sins.

In the blessing, Jacob invokes the covenant in two significant ways.

- **MAY THEY BE BLESSED IN THE PERPETUATING OF THE FAMILY NAME.** Through these boys the purpose of God to magnify Himself by extending their fame and reputation would unfold. Not just through them alone, but certainly through them as well, the covenant blessing would be extended.

- **MAY THEY BE BLESSED IN THE GROWING INTO A GREAT MULTITUDE.** While the covenant sees all the sons of Abraham as becoming a great nation and a greater multitude, Jacob’s blessing invokes that for these two sons and their descendents. Over the long years, this blessing unfolds as Ephraim becomes the largest and wealthiest of what would be the northern tribes.
By His Elevation of the Younger  (v.17-20)

Then Joseph notices the placing of the hands. He is upset. Jacob, in spite of his care, has gotten it wrong. “Here Dad, your hands are crossed and the right hand is on the wrong boy. Here let me help you.” And he reaches out to switch Jacob’s hands.

O, but by faith, Jacob has discerned the purposes and patterns of God’s ways. He knows that he has reversed his hands. He has done it on purpose. Don’t move them. Leave them as they are. This is God’s way. This is God’s purpose.

You see, down through the Bible God has purposed in his ways to elevate the younger over the elder. We have seen this in Genesis with Seth over Cain. Isaac is the true son over Ishmael the older. Jacob is the chosen over Eau the elder. David the second regent will establish his line over Saul, the first. David the youngest of his brothers will become the king. The New Covenant is established as the Old Covenants are fulfilled, fade and now, finished. The first heavens and the first earth will be ended and righteousness will flourish in the new heavens and the new earth. This is the way of God and purpose of God.

It is like this so that God may frustrate the wisdom and the way of the world.

So Israel will one day turn this surprising blessing into its invocation. The Irish are famous for their wry and witty blessings. We have lost much in that we do not know how to give and less how receive blessing words. But among the Israelites and among the people of God this will become an illustration of faith, an invocation of blessing and an invitation to the covenant. “May God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh.”

Acknowledges the Providences of God  (v.21-22)

The faith of a mature saint also acknowledges the good providences of God. It sees behind the veil of outward circumstances the hidden but powerfully working hand of God. So Jacob’s future blessing for Joseph and his tribes rests in God’s kind providences.

With the Presence of the Lord  (v.21)

There is no sweeter place to rest in the last days of life than in the assurance of God’s presence and God’s promises. Yes, Jacob is about to die. But all that He has hoped in and banked on does not flicker out in the twilight of his life. No, it is bright flame that is passed on with deep assurance to his son. God will be with Joseph and his people just has He has been with Jacob all these long years and in these last moments. The past promises of God that have sustained Jacob also assure Joseph that they will return to the land promised them.

With the Present of the Land  (v.22)

Jacob acknowledges the providences of God in the victories he has won and the land he has gained. In a play on the word Shechem, Jacob bequeaths to Joseph this mountain slope town and district which he has fought for and won by war. So Joseph and later, Israel, are hereby warned that the promises of God that bring
them surely back to the land will necessitate the sword and bow under the providences of God. They will have win the land they have been promised.

Why have we talked today about Jacob’s actions here arising from faith? How can we say that this is the faith of a mature saint? Because Hebrews 11:21 says, “By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.” Jacob’s blessing is by faith. He is acting on what he knows to be true. He knows the promises, purposes and providences of God through the Word. And this is an act of worship. This leaning on his staff and adopting Joseph’s boys as an act of blessing Joseph all because of believing God in an obeying way.

May God cause us, in the twilight of life, to be men and women whose gentleness, sweetness and faith magnify our great God. May we speak much of His great promises that He has fulfilled and others that we are eagerly awaiting. May we speak much of His great purposes, some of which counter the wisdom of the world and thus cause us to delight in His intricate and surprising ways. May we speak much of His providences, His hand on our lives. May we help others to be blessed by our words and ways. May we help others to arrive home with gracious and godly dignity.

We are like Ephraim and Manasseh. We have been brought into God’s spiritual family as heirs, not in the place of another, but because of Another. Like Joseph, Jesus is magnified by the untold multiplication of honor that comes when all the saints are named as His joint-heirs. In the vast and limitless wealth of God, Jesus is not receiving less because of this and His honor is ever the greater. Thus, God’s love for us His children is primarily about making much of Christ.

As I close this morning, as recipients of the new, the greater and magnificent in the surprising purposes of God, may God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.
**Blessing and Destiny**

*Genesis 49*

**Introduction**

In our culture, a last will and testament is usually read after the person dies and is buried. The stories of surprises at their reading are legendary. My favorite is, “Being of sound mind and body, I spent it all.” Warren Buffet and Bill Gates are in the enviable position of being able to give most of their fortunes away and still leave their children wealth beyond imagining. Yet, to their very great credit, they have measured out in their own lifetimes for the good of their heirs and many others.

What we will be reading today is the last will and testament of Jacob, the Patriarch. But it is being given, not through the sealed writing in a lawyer’s office, but directly from the person in the final hours of life. His impending death is not unexpected. While still able, he prepares and delivers his last will and testament.

Two major ideas characterize this will and testament: it is a bequest and a blessing. Through it prophecy is being made. It is prophetic poetry or what would later become known as an oracle. The choices these brothers have made and the character those choices flow from will have dramatic impact on the destiny of their descendants. The blessing pouring through the prism of their character and their choices emerges as a brilliant rainbow of variegated results.

As Jacob lay on his death bed, he had summoned his son, Joseph. He had made him swear to take his body back to Canaan and bury him there. He had then blessed Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. In that blessing he had given Joseph a double portion by adopting Ephraim and Manasseh as his own. Now it is time to gather the family. Listen to how Kent Hughes described this scene.

Confined to his bed, old Jacob had become accustomed to a new angle of sight, looking at his tent’s ceiling and the distorted faces that swim in and out of his fading vision overhead, peering down at him like big, gawking fish. Now his twelve sons all gathered above him, wall-eyed and expectant. There were Leah’s six oldest: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar. There were the sons of Rachel’s handmaid Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali. There were the sons of Leah’s handmaid Zilpah: Gad and Asher. And there were his beloved Rachel’s late-in-life sons: Joseph, in his regal attire, and Benjamin, the youngest. All of this swam undulating before Jacob’s fading eyes. (*Genesis*, Hughes, p. 549)

Then, rising up, he speaks the words of blessing and destiny.
The Disqualified \( \text{(v.1-7)} \)

All three of these brothers are disqualified by spiritual impatience, by not being willing to wait on God. Their wanted something so badly, they craved for it and were mastered by it causing them to act sinfully. Those sinful choices had long-reaching affect beyond themselves.

**By Impatience and Immorality \( \text{(v.3-4)} \)**

Reuben is the first born of Jacob. He should have the place of preeminence. The mantle of family, tribal and national leadership should be transferred to his shoulders. But it will not. He will not receive the first portion, the double inheritance.

Why? Because Reuben is unstable. He will not provide the leadership that will be needed. Just as he did in all of the brother’s difficulties with Joseph, both at home and in Egypt, he waffled. But then, his greater condemnation is in his taking advantage of his father by bedding his concubine in a grab for power and position. In other words, in stead of being willing to wait for God’s timing in becoming the tribal patriarch, he craved that place and position so much that he committed immorality. In a shocking display and grab for power, he showed his instability, his impatience and his immorality.

How often we are prone to this. We are driven by a desire, a craving, a legitimate want that becomes a bad master. We sin to get what we want. And in the very reaching out to get it we disqualify ourselves from attaining it or keeping it.

**By Anger and Vengeance \( \text{(v.5-7)} \)**

The next in line to lead the family would be Simeon. Maybe hope sprang up in his heart when he heard the disqualification of Reuben. But, more likely, he and Levi looked at one another with and hung their heads. They had come under the immediate and unending censure of their father. And rightly so. They had no sense for a rich and patient mix of mercy and justice. When their sister had been forcibly taken, they had responded with cruel and overreaching vengeance. They did so because they were violent men in their hearts. They had no regard for justice of God, His limits on what can be done and His patience for when it can be done.

So, Jacob disqualifies them as well. The double blessing and familial leadership does not pass to either of them. They will become scattered within Israel. We are reminded again about the justice of God. We must be willing to be patient and wait for God to move. We must leave room for God’s wrath. We can cry out to God for Him to act while we, aware of His mercy to us, wait for Him to act.

Now this raises an important question: how can the disqualification of these three brothers be a blessing? It sounds more like a curse. Ah, here is an important theme in Genesis and throughout the whole Bible. Sin turns many opportunities for blessing into obstacles of judgment. But through the very application of the judgment, blessing will eventually come. Levi will not inherit its own land. Yet, they will become the priests to the Lord. They will mediate the blessing of access to God through the Old Covenant. So the shadows of the cross lie across the death bed of Jacob. For in
becoming a curse for us, bearing the curse of the Law and the penalty for our sin, Jesus has secured our reconciliation. At the cross, He mediates the blessing of access to God through the New Covenant.

**The Exalted** *(v.8-12)*

Now Jacob turns to the one to whom the leadership will be given. Judah are exalted as the monarchial tribe. This elevation brings a deep sense of humbleness as well as satisfaction. His journey has been from sordid sin through sacrificial repentance arriving at sovereign blessedness. Now he is humbled before his father and his God and is elevated in sight of all.

**In his Praise** *(v.8)*

His brothers shall do what his name means – they shall praise him. They will honor him as he defends them and overcomes their enemies. They will humble themselves before him as they bow to his regency. What had been Joseph’s portion now in Egypt will become Judah’s place in the future.

**In his Power** *(v.9)*

In a wonderful and enduring image, Judah is a lion. This became his symbol. Judah is lion of Israel, great and mighty in his power. Even as a cub, he takes down and rises up from prey. When he becomes mature, he will sit on a throne against which none would dare to rise with power none dare to rouse against them.

**In his Position** *(v.10)*

Judah will be the ruler forever, for the scepter and staff, his position, will never depart from between his feet. The enduring symbol of the governance of God’s people will be a shepherd’s staff. In Judah’s line will be the long line of Shepherd-Kings over God’s people.

But there is more here – he will rule over God’s people until he rules over all the peoples, all the nations. It is possible for the phrase “until tribute comes” to be rendered “until he to whom it is due comes” or “until Shiloh comes.” There is a phrase much like this with the same ambiguity in Ezekiel 21:26. Is there in the subtlety of the Hebrew here a shadowy look into a shining future? Is redemptive history here? Will the Kings of Israel rule until the last great shepherd-king comes? When Shiloh comes, then tribute, obedience, fealty will stream to his honor and he will reign over all.

**In his Person** *(v.11-12)*

In language picked up all over the prophetic books in both the Old and New Testaments, this blessing in his person is applied to the Messiah, to the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is language of both personal humility and personal victory. He will come on a donkey’s colt one day, bringing redemption for His people. He will come on a white horse one day, bringing justice and wrath against those who reject Him. And he will be beautiful and desirable to His people, more than we can imagine.
So Judah’s blessing and destiny is the kingship. From him will come the great lion and shepherd king. The last king in the line will be the greatest of all. He, King Jesus, will rule and reign as King and all the peoples, all the nations will bow to Him.

The Prosperous (v.13-21)
Next, the bequest and blessing prophesies the prosperous future and greatness of this group of brothers and tribes. That blessing will come through difficulty and diligence. Some will become successful by human measure, yet are being censured by God. Most of the way the initial bequest is stated is a play on the name.

In their Strategic Location (v.13)
Where Zebulun eventually settled placed them astride the most important trade routes to both the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Isaiah prophesied of a coming day of glory for Zebulun (Isaiah 9:1) which was fulfilled as Jesus criss-crossed their region during his ministry (Matthew 4:13-15).

In their Vigorous Work (v.14-15)
Issachar were a hard working and industrious people who settled in a fertile area. Yet, rather than overcome those who lived there, they initially became serfs whose labor brought them early success. Later, they shrugged off their slavery, gaining prosperity and prestige. At a time when Israel needed guidance, Issachar had men who understood the times and helped Israel to know what to do (1 Chronicles 12:32).

In their Eroding Judgeship (v.16-18)
Dan, whose name means judge, did become the judges of Israel. But they were morally and spiritually bankrupt. The first great outbreak of idolatry began in Dan. This led to their decline. They abandoned the land they were assigned and moved to the northernmost part of Canaan. The city at the northern most tip of Israel became the way one referred to all of Israel, “from Dan to Beersheba”. They are not listed as one of the tribes in Revelation 7:4-8.

In their Valiant Warriors (v.19)
Gad, whose name sounds like the Hebrew word for raid(er), settled in the Trans-Jordon region. Raiding armies trying to reach the rich agricultural regions had to cross their land, often ravaging their villages and towns. Gad became skilled and valiant warriors, learning to fight on the run. They often attacked and destroyed enemy armies attempting to return across their lands.

In their Skilled Farming (v.20)
Asher were granted and settled into a region of Canaan whose land was rich and rainfall plentiful. They worked the coastal lands north of Mt. Carmel. The tribe became skillful and productive farmers providing many of the staples and delicacies Israel was known for.
In their Military and Verbal Prowess  

Naphtali was to become known for two things: their fast attack troops and their eloquence. They are often praised for their ability to move quickly and fight well. They were a tribe of singer soldiers. The second phrase here evidently is difficult: it can be translated either as we have it in the ESV or as “he gives beautiful words.” Deborah and Barak, both of the tribe of Naphtali, are great examples of both soldier and poet (Judges 4:6).

This is the way to leave and launch sons. How often what is left to children ends up ruining and destroying them. Not so this man with his boys. From his example, you give your children a bequest and a blessing that causes them and motivates them to hard work and diligence.

The Valiant  

Before we consider the Joseph the blessed, let us consider Benjamin, the valiant. To us this hardly sounds like a blessing. We are not impressed by ravening wolves. But before there can come everlasting blessing there must be a hard fought victory. This is the blessing of Benjamin. He, this seeming mildest of youngest brothers will bring victory in battle. He will bring down the prey. He will divide the spoil. But he will be fierce and sometimes cruel (Judges 20). But there came a day whenever Israel marched forth to battle they cried out, “After you, O Benjamin.”

The Blessed  

The super abundance of overflowing blessing is poured out on Joseph. I have chosen to call him, the blessed, because of it. In loving and lush eloquence, Jacob lavishes a cornucopia of blessing for Joseph and his descendents.

In his Fruitfulness  

In an image not easy for us to always see and feel, Jacob portrays the grand and glorious beauty of his blessing. He will become like a fruitful vine, growing up from springs of waters, growing and spreading with lush extravagance over the wall with fruit hanging massive, damp, plump and weighty. This image will be invoked in the words of Isaiah 4:2, referring to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. “In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.”

In his Faithfulness  

Joseph is blessed in his God sustained faithfulness. He had already been faithful through enormous trial and difficult hardships. By the Mighty One of Jacob, the Shepherd and Stone of Israel, his descendents will remain steadfast and faithful under attack. When being sinned against, they will know God as their Sustainer, their Shepherd and their Stone.
Jesus is ever faithful in Himself and for His people. Though sinned against often and wounded deeply, He bore it with grace and gladness. He suffered much from the hands of sinners and for those He would redeem. As such, the line from verse 24 will run through Isaiah 49:26, “Then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

And we must be faithful as well. When we are being attacked by the enemy or sinned against, even by our friends or family, our recourse and resource is in our God. He will be our Sustainer, enabling us by His grace. He will be our Shepherd, guiding and guarding us even at the table He has prepared for us in the presence of our enemies. He will be our Stone, our solid rock and foundation, on whom we will rest. Faithfulness abounds when God’s people rely in and rest on Christ.

**In his Favoredness**

(v.25-26)

Then there are the blessings that come to one who is crowned with favor. Like a mighty pyramid of bounty, blessing upon blessing are piled up as a mighty memorial to El Shaddai, to the Almighty. Here the language of blessing can barely sustain the lavish wonders poured out. Here are the blessings of heaven above, the deeps beneath, the womb and the breast. Here are blessings beyond his fathers, bounty springing up and running deep and strong out of the everlasting hills.

Instead of an Egyptian miter, all of these blessings are then gathered up into a gorgeous creation, a lavish headdress that sits on Joseph’s brow. All that Egypt offered and gave him are nothing compared to the extravagant excess that the Almighty will sumptuously grace his brow with.

In all of his blessing, this will hardly compare to the bounty and blessing of our Lord Jesus. His righteousness and mercy will run out from the watered springs of His soul. His vine of the Spirit will droop low with grand clusters of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. All the wealth of heaven bejewels His arms and throat and head. All the richness of earth, all the sweet springs of waters, all the lush harvests, all the towering trees bubble and bend at the moment of his coming. From Him spring uncounted myriads of children in all the ages from all the peoples. His little ones are lovingly nourished at the breast of Word of God, fed and nurtured until strong meat is taken. He is the blessed, the favored of His heavenly Father whose pleasure He serves, whose smile He receives, whose will He obeys, whose joy floods His soul. All this cascades like a rushing torrent from way back up in the everlasting hills of the heart of God Almighty.
And we, yes we, are blessed in His blessing.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. [Ephesians 1:3-14.]

This, O this is our true blessing and true destiny.
Sweet and Hard Providences  
*Genesis 49:28-50:26*

**Introduction**  
Life is full of obstacles. We have all experienced those hard times when life takes a sharp turn that throws us off balance. How you think about life will make a great difference how you respond to those times. The lens of your heart, the focus of your thinking, will determine how well you handle the hard providences.

One of the hardest providences is coming to the end of life. <Story of my Dad’s death ending with Romans 8:28>  
This text is filled that sort of obstacle as well. In it there is dying and grieving and responding to life’s hardships. Once again, it looks as though God’s promises may be dim and His purposes unfulfilled. His people are in Egypt, not the Promised Land. We are gathered around the death bed of Jacob, the clan’s last great patriarch. The tears are probably starting to flow. Most of us can feel the hardness of this moment. And yet, mingled in is a certain sweetness as well.

**Mourning in Hope**  
*(49:28-50:14)*  
Jacob had gathered his boys around and blessed, prophesying of their destiny as God’s purposes and their character will intertwine down through the centuries.

**Faith in the Dying**  
*(49:28-33)*  
Jacob exhibits faith as he dies. He believes the promises of God concerning the land. So he commands his sons to lay him to rest in the land where the patriarchs were buried. This field had been purchased and set aside for their graves. He wants to be buried in the land God promised in the place of his fathers.

How does this kind of faith both encourage and challenge us? It is hard for us to answer a question like this because we avoid thinking about dying. Our culture is a lot about the pursuit of eternal youth. Christians are also often poured into the world’s mold of focusing on our looks, our health, our diet and so on. I have heard all the arguments that we are stewards of our bodies and so… No, I think too often that is simply a veneer of spirituality over deep seated cravings largely shaped by our world.

Why do I say this? Because when we talk about dying you become distinctly uncomfortable. You do not want to think about dying. It is something far away. It is an enemy to be avoided at all costs, yes. But, like everything else, if we do not think about it Biblically and plan for it practically, it will come up on us and we will not be prepared. Jacob has come to the time of his death in faith. He has thought about what believing God means for when life ends. And so, he dies well.
The Puritans were convinced that unless one was ready to die well, one would not live well. They left us a great legacy of both. They lived well in the midst of sweet and hard providences. And they died well with faith and humility. So let us determine that we will die well – that we will so grow in our faith in God and our walk with God that the day of our dying will be a passing through from dimness to unimaginable brightness.

**Faith in the Grieving (50:1-14)**

Joseph exhibits faith as he grieves. It is a faith that obeys. It is a faith that goes to great lengths even in the midst of great sadness and loss to keep his word and honor his father.

Joseph moves with quiet determination. This was going to take quite a long time. He orders the embalming, which would take 40 days. Israel (Jacob) would be embalmed in the Egyptian fashion. They had almost perfected the art. Their science of embalming has left us Egyptian mummies giving us opportunities to study the Egyptians as people. It is quite possible then that Jacob was embalmed and placed in a sarcophagus.

In the Egyptian culture, the proper period for mourning was seventy days. Joseph chooses to follow the customs around him, still determined to take his father home to Canaan. At the end of the time, he seeks and is granted permission to visit Canaan and bury his father. So great is his witness to the Egyptians that when he goes, a great host of Egyptians goes up with him. All of the court and many of the people trek to Canaan to grieve with Joseph. Yet, the respect he has earned and relationships he has built were never at the expense of his testimony. All know that this man is full of faith in God.

Upon their arrival in Canaan, Joseph and the Israelites all begin to express their grief in their own way. It is a time of deep lament and much weeping. The Canaanites are surprised at the great grief and the great company of Egyptians who join in with sorrow and sympathy. So they bring Jacob to his resting place and bury him in the field with his fathers and his beloved wife.

We are challenged by this kind of faith. We are too often and too easily derailed by difficulty. But this is exactly the right time to demonstrate a great faith, a faith that will commit to delighting in God and doing God’s will regardless. So it is a faith that both grieves and obeys. People will see and notice. In hardship, trusting in God will both baffle and entice people. It will be a witness of the graces and goodness of God.
Comfort in Submission  (50:15-21)
But all is not well in the household. In the weak hearts of Joseph’s brothers, dark lies and deep fears begin to arise.

The Heart of Fear  (v.15-18)
Now that Jacob is dead, Joseph’s brothers begin to fear for their lives. After all the years of care and provision, they now begin to suspect Joseph. They begin to impute to him what is not true. Their emotions of fear come from lies that they believe. They are saying in their hearts and to one another that Joseph has not taken revenge against them because of their father. Now that Jacob is dead, Joseph will be free to exact his revenge. They think that he has hated them all along and has not wanted to bring grief to his father. They have to be thinking that Joseph has been lying and deceiving them all along. In their hearts, they twist his strengths of patience and persistence into cold and calculating laying in wait. With their hearts filled with the false thoughts, they are afraid.

Now they begin to try to manipulate and appease Joseph. They send a message that is probably not even true. It is doubtful that Jacob told them this. But here is the message. “Our father told us to let you know that you should forgive us.” At least, there seems to be a clear admission of all the evil they had committed. But this is intended to be manipulation. Joseph has enormous power over their lives. They think they are very vulnerable. Rather than taking Joseph at his word and believing the best about him, they are now going to impute bad motivations even to the good he has done for them. As many people will do, they attribute to him their own faults. Their own weaknesses, sins and failures become dark shaded glasses through which Joseph is seen. Rather than approach him open handed with honesty and humility, they come and cower in his presence.

The Heart of Trust  (v.19-21)
How would we respond to this? These brothers continue to sin. Isn’t it true that we would be prone to thoughts and words like these, “Well, if this is what they think, then this is what I am going to do.” Maybe we would say in anger, “How dare they think like this. After all they did to me and all I have done for them, how dare they impute such motivations to me! How do they know what I am thinking?” Or maybe we would stand over them with our power over them and let them suffer for a while. After all, they are the ones who are badly mistaken. So, let them cower for a while.

But notice how Joseph responds to them. When they speak to him like this, he breaks down and weeps. He is broken hearted. He has acted with a good conscience before God. It breaks his heart that his brothers would think such of him. This is startling. This is neither what we expect nor how we tend to respond.

What is going on in Joseph’s heart that squeezes tears from his eyes? What does he believe so strongly and desire so submissively that he weeps when misunderstood? Ah, brothers and sisters, here is a great heart that understands and trusts in God.
HE UNDERSTANDS HIS TRUE PLACE BEFORE GOD (V.19). Here is humility in the powerful. While he has great authority, he keeps his heart humble before God. He is not God. He is not in God’s place and he will not try to be God to them. How much trouble we have with others when we try to be the God in their lives! How much trouble we get into when we make idols (gods) of people in our lives. We need to be humble in our relationships so that we do not try to control them. And we need to know how to honor those we are responsible to without elevating them above measure or expecting what is not possible.

HE TRUSTS IN THE GOOD PURPOSES OF GOD (V.20). He recognizes that God is working through the evil men do to bring about the good He has purposed. Now this is a very important truth. It is central to the redemptive themes of the Bible. Evil is not outside of God’s control. He never does evil. But the evil in the world and the evil done by men is part of how God intends to bring about good for His people. The great evil of unjustly killing the pure and innocent Son of God is how redemption is accomplished. God is at work in the evil people do around you and even to you so as to accomplish His purposes. Some of those purposes involve you directly. Some of the evil done against you may be and often actually is for the good of others. Do you believe this? Do you believe this so strongly that you would weep when misunderstood?

HE DESIRES TO CONTINUE TO DO GOOD FOR THEM (V.21). He promises to provide for them. He assures them that they have no need to fear. He speaks kindly to them. He comforts them. The sweet and hard providences of God have taught his heart and tenderized his words. He is gracious and kind. What a convicting and challenging example this is. We are often so unlike this. I know it is easy to think of some big thing that troubles you. But what about in your common relationship with your spouse, your parents, your boss, others in ministry? Is your heart so organized by truth and oriented toward God that you move with good toward others who hurt you?

The effect is to calm their fears and cultivate their relationship. There is a great unity of spirit that is evident here. But Joseph had to take the initiative in responding well. He could not sit back and wait for them to get it right. He was poised to forgive them. Now that they have openly acknowledged their evil, he immediately forgives them. His forgiveness is not begrudging. It is generous, gracious and full of kindness.

Here is our Redeemer as well. His rules with absolute power and yet is poised to do us good. His heart is one of mercy. We should not cower before Him. Yes, we must bow in submission. But the doctrine of His providence is not a hard doctrine, but a sweet one.

Is this the way you believe in the providence and purposes of God? Is this what rules your heart? Is this what fuels your affections? Is this what directs your words? Is the trajectory of your forgiveness guided along the path of trusting in God’s hand? Do you see God’s finger prints on everything?
Direction in Expectation (50:22-26)
Joseph lives scores of years and like his father, gathers his family as he comes to the end of his days.

The Richness of his Life (v.22-23)
In language conveying the fullness and richness of his life, Joseph sees the great-great grandchildren of Ephraim. He is there at the birth Manasseh’s grandson. He has loved long, enjoyed much and seen the beginning of the fulfillment of his father’s blessings on Ephraim.

The Instruction upon his Death (v.24-25)
Then he comes to the end of his life. He gathers his brothers and family around him. He has now lived in Egypt for around 93 years. He seems settled and content with the providences and provision of God. But he also believes that God will fulfill what He has promised. God will visit His people and bring them up out of Egypt and bring them into the land He had promised.

Since God will do this, then they must promise to take his bones back to Canaan and bury them with his fathers. What he believes emerges in the instructions he gives. His faith produces works, as it always does. So, when God brings the Israelites up out of Egypt, then they are take his body home to Canaan.

In the faith Joseph has and the instruction he gives, Moses sets the stage for the book of Exodus. Just as God had promised, He will visit His people. He will bring them up out of Egypt. And He will bring them into the land. As Israel hears this book for the first time, they are in the middle of God’s visiting them and bringing them to the land. He who has begun this work in what Joseph believed will assuredly actually bring to completion what He has promised.

The Anticipation of his Return (v.26)
The family hears both his faith and his instruction. So, when he dies, like his father, he is embalmed in the Egyptian manner. He is put in a coffin. The day will come when that coffin will be carried by Ephraim’s sons back to Canaan. There, Joseph will be buried. But what he does not know is that it will be many years until that day. And centuries until he reaches his final resting place in the new heavens and new earth.
The great challenge in the Christian life is faith. I am not talking about the faith at the moment of our salvation. I am talking about faith that believes God moment by moment through all the sweet and hard providences. We have seen faith in the dying and faith in the grieving. We see faith that looks forward in hope. We have seen faith that moves now in obedience. Is this your faith? Do you believe God moment by moment? Do you truly trust Him even as you are trusting in Him? Is your life marked by the stability and steadiness that comes when resting in Christ?

How will we do well even when people sin against us? How does Joseph not strike back when he has opportunity? How do we love people who have wronged us and move toward them with compassion, gentleness and assurance? How do we seek their good when they have sought our harm? How do we not become angry, bitter, cynical and hard? We must believe with all our hearts the doctrine of God’s providence. We must believe that God is working in all things for our good and for His glory. We must believe deep in our souls that God is making us like Christ. Bitterness, anger, hardness, frustration are all symptoms that we have put our hope in people and failed to rest in God’s good providences. In the midst of both sweet and hard providences, God’s purposes and providences are our necessary truths.

Just as God had promised to visit Israel and bring them up out of Egypt and bring them to their Promised Land, so God has visited His people in Christ. Jesus has come into this world to deliver us from it and to bring us home to God. This great Exodus is our redemption. Our redemption is what God has done to save us from sin and to bring us to God.

Joseph rested even in death that God would finish what He had promised and what He had begun. Paul rests in that very same great truth. “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the Day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6 ESV) We rest in the assurance of that great truth. It is how we can have hope in the greatest hardships, comfort others understanding the providences of God and rest with quietness and godliness in the day of our death. That which God has begun, from creation to eternity, from Genesis to Revelation, from your birth to your death, He will complete. He will complete it at the Day of Christ when He will magnified and glorified.

So may God cause you rest in Him in the sweet and hard providences of life.
Glorying in Christ through Genesis

Introduction

What is the Bible about? Luke tells what the Bible is about.

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Luke 24:25-27 [ESV]

Genesis is the fountainhead of truth about Jesus. He and His redeeming work are beginning to be revealed, albeit in the shadow land of the Old Covenant.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus’ sovereign rule. We find that God expects to rule and to be the titular king over His people. He establishes that rule through His covenant and His Word.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus’ personal identity. All through the book, the Spirit shines on characters in the narratives that are shadows of the substance, the Lord Jesus.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus’ saving mission. Flowing from the words of sacrifice, come the streams of saving mercies through a Savior. By the end of Genesis, all readers are expected to understand that animals being sacrificed are a substitute until the true Sacrifice comes.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus’ martial union. Through the metaphor of marriage and the stories of marriage, we begin to have a glimpse into the union of Christ with His bride. The great mystery that Paul explores in Ephesians is tied to the marriage of Adam and Eve, to the institution of marriage itself.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus’ ultimate victory. While fallenness and failures tend to dominate the text, there are grand moments of victory over sin and the enemies of God. In these we begin to see the Great War our soul’s enemy has waged and his eventual defeat.

I intend this morning for an illustrative summary, not an exhaustive study, of the great Christ-centeredness of the Genesis. It sets the stage for Jesus being at the center of the redemptive story.

\[1\] All Scripture texts in this message from the English Standard Version.

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The Creator of the Universe

Genesis 2:4
Jesus the creator and sustainer of all that is made, of all that is not God. He has brought it into existence as the creating word from His Father. He sustains it by the Word of His power. Marred now by sin and the fall with its curse, He is bringing about a new creation beginning with His people and culminating in the New Heavens and New Earth.

John 1:1-5
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Colossians 1:15-16
He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

The Seeker of the Fallen

Genesis 3:1-20
Jesus is the voice, the questioner, the accuser, the Redeemer. He is the one who pursues His people, prosecutes His people, is punished on behalf of His people and then acquits them and sets them free.

Luke 19:1-10
He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

John 4:23-2
But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.
The Future Victor

In this prophecy to Satan, God introduces the One who, through the bruising of His heel, will bring the victory over the Enemy. Through His own death and resurrection, the chief instrument of Satan’s rule, death, is overcome through Jesus’ reigning life.

Romans 16:19-20

For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Hebrews 2:14-15

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Revelation 20:1-3, 10

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

…and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The Ark of Safety in Judgment

Christ is the Ark in whom we are safe from the wrath of God and in the Day of Judgment.

1 Peter 3:18-20

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
The Seal of God’s Covenant Good

The Lord Jesus brings God’s good to His people though His covenants in which He has given us seals and symbols of His purposes. Thus, we who have been delivered from the wrath of God and emerge as new creations in Christ have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. The rainbow throughout the Bible points us to all that Christ purposes and promises.

Ezekiel 1:26-28

And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Revelation 4:1-6

After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

Revelation 10:1-7

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.” And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.
The Abrahamic Descendent

Genesis 17:1-8

Jesus is the promised descendant, the son of Abraham. It is through Him that all believers are Abraham’s sons.

Romans 4:7-12

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Galatians 3:7-14; 23-29

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

(23) Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.
The Lamb until the Son

Jesus is the true Lamb, the Son who is the sacrifice for the sins of His people. Isaac, the son of Abraham goes to be sacrificed. A ram, a substitute takes his place and is sacrificed. The blood of lambs, goats and bulls will be shed as a covering until the final son, the final Isaac, Jesus, who will pour out His own life as the once-for-ever sacrifice.

John 1:29-34

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

Hebrews 9:11-15

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies or the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Revelation 5:1-10

Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the
thron[e. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, they shall reign on the earth.”

The Ladder to Heaven

Jesus is the ladder to heaven. He is the gate and house of God. In our sojourn here on earth and through the difficult hardships flowing out of sin and fallenness, we need to know that the Lord ever sees us, is ever with us and ever keeps us in His care.

John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”
The Mistreated Brother

Genesis 37:25-28

Jesus is the one who came to live among his brethren. He was hated, mistreated, misunderstood, persecuted and finally killed. Yet in all this, He never struck back; He never reviled but committed Himself to God who judges justly. Through the very sins of others against Him, He brought about the salvation of His people.

1 Peter 2:18-25

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The Servant of God's Great Purposes

Genesis 50:15-21

Jesus serves to do the good will of His Father whose purposes are glorious and whose providences can be trusted. In doing so, Jesus, the mighty ruler, leans toward us, His brethren, we who are sons by faith in Him. He will provide for us and take care of us.

Hebrews 2:10-13

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Hebrews 4:14-16

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
Lessons

Two Christ-exalting, heart-lifting texts from Philippians in closing:

Philippians 2:5-11

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 3:20-4:1

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Therefore, through Genesis and all the Bible we glory in Christ who has been made low and has been exalted to the highest place so that we will know Him, reflect Him, glory in Him and stand firm in Him until He comes.
Growing in Faith through Genesis
Hebrews 11:1-22

Introduction
What an amazing time we have had studying Genesis together. I sense from many of you that it has been a mutual delight, mine in the preparing and preaching and yours in the discovering and doing. This morning once again, I want to preach through Genesis. Not from Genesis itself, but rather by preaching from Hebrews 11.

The word “faith” does not occur in Genesis. The word “believe” as it relates to God occurs one time and that in Genesis 15:6. “And he [Abraham] believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness.” The word “please” or its forms is only used one time in reference to God and that in Genesis 8:21, “And the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma [of Noah’s sacrifice], the Lord said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground…”

Yet, we have 22 verses of Hebrews 11 that will insist people did what they did by faith and that it was pleasing to the Lord. For example, Abel offers a better sacrifice, Enoch pleases God in His walk and Noah builds an ark. Now I want to show you how important it is that we know our Old Testaments and that we always go back to look at texts that are quoted by New Testament writers. Do you know the surprising thing when you go back to these accounts in Genesis? Not one of them mentions faith.

Now that is a problem. How does the author of Hebrews know these men did what they did by faith? Remember, he is not arguing for the nature of faith from these texts. He is not saying, “Because I find faith mentioned in these stories, therefore faith must be the way they please God.” His argument is just the opposite. He sees faith in the stories, not because it is mentioned, but because these men did please God. There is no other way to please Him than by faith. Look at Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Listen to the Divine logic here:

- **Assertion**: Only when we believe God in an obeying way do we please God. Faith is the only way to please God.
- **Observation**: Enoch pleased God because God took him up to heaven.
- **Conclusion**: Enoch had faith.

So these saints in Genesis do what they do by faith. Why? Because that is the only way to please God. So verses 1-2 prepare us to see this in them:

They have **confidence** in what they believe God for and thus they have hope.

They are **convinced** of what is not seen and thus they hope in God.

They are **commended** through their faith and thus they wait for God.
Faith Accepts God’s Word Implicitly (v.3)

Faith is how we understand what the Bible tells us. Hebrews shows that it is by faith that we understand. It is neither a blind leap nor some mystical thing arising from nowhere – rather, it is an understanding of what the Bible says. Here, the Bible says that God created all that is made by His very own speaking. This is something we can only know from the Bible. Yet not everyone who reads or even knows the Bible, believes in an understanding way this truth. What is the difference between those who do and those who don’t? The gift of faith by God. It is not because they are more intellectual or less sinful. It is sheer grace giving faith so that by it, we understand.

Faith helps us draw conclusions from that understanding. Genuine faith is assured of and convinced by the Genesis record that God created everything. Since all that is seen was created by all that is unseen, then the unseen is real. You must never equate unseen with unreal. That is doubt. Faith affirms the unseen is real. So, God exists. God made. God promises. In His promises, God describes what I cannot see and what I do not yet have and yet it is real and will come to pass.

And it is so real, that you sense its flavor, its smell, its taste right now. This not because you dream it up or conjure it up by human effort or imagination or technique. But rather you read it in God’s Word. You believe it because of God. Then what the Word of God speaks of is real—broken like sweet bread and poured out like refreshing water and the spiritual taste of your heart is awakened. All that God promises and gives, you are expecting now with confidence and assurance.

*By faith we believe that God created everything by His Word.*

Faith Comes to God Acceptably (v.4)

Abel offers a better sacrifice. He sacrifices a lamb and does so by faith — that is his offering of the lamb has in it the essence of his hope and is the evidence what is not seen. When Abel brings his sacrifice, he knows for sure that what he is doing is pointing forward to something unseen to come later. He does not expect this lamb to save. He is utterly convinced with an unshakable assurance that God will send a Lamb. On that and with this lamb, he sets his hope. So, Abel comes to worship God in God’s way. He brings a sacrifice. He knows that he will only be accepted because of God’s own provision of sacrifice. His faith alone brings into his soul the testimony affirming that he stands righteous in God’s sight.

How is it that Abel still speaks? He speaks through the Word. We read his story in the Word. We believe it is true. We see the story line leading us to Jesus, the Lamb who came to take away the sins of the world. We see Him crucified and resurrected. And it is real in our souls — so real we rest on and hope in that work alone for the saving of our souls. Genuine faith then conveys to our souls a sense of assurance and confidence that we are saved now and will be saved in the Day of Judgment. We have understood that the Word is still speaking in the Scriptures.

*By faith we come to God through the sacrifices He accepts, that is His Son, Jesus Christ.*
Faith Walks with God Commendably
(v.5-6)

By faith, Enoch pleased God. How did he please God? Genesis 6:21-24 says that Enoch walked with God. God publicly commended Enoch’s pleasing walk by taking him out of the world, but not through death. Now again notice, by faith Enoch’s walk with God had in it both the essence of pleasing God and the evidence that pleasing God is worthwhile. His walk with God had the fragrance of heaven and proved that God was real. It pleased God and delighted Him. So God rewarded Enoch’s faith by taking him directly to paradise.

Imagine having the kind of communion and fellowship and walk with God that has in it here on earth the essence of heaven. How amazing it is to know, to have an unshakable assurance that we are living in such a way that it brings pleasure to God. When we live like this we show that pleasing God is better than pleasure and God puts His stamp of approval on it.

By faith we walk with God so as to be pleasing to Him.

Faith Fears God Reverently
(v.7)

The faith of a believer affects him in his whole person.

- Mind – He was warned. He heard God’s Word.
- Affections – He was moved with fear. What he heard moved
- Will – He built a boat

Noah was warned about something he had never seen – a flood and possibly even, rain. He believed God about what he could not see and bowed in holy fear before the promises and the power of God and built a boat. Noah’s obedient faith was a witness. Noah preached and proclaimed and warned. What he said was backed up by how he lived. He was utterly convinced that God was going to do what He said He would and had an unshakable assurance that this boat he was building was how God would deliver him and his family.

Noah’s boat building faith and world warning witness had in it the essence of God’s holy and soon coming wrath. It smelled of judgment waiting in the oven. It stood off the page of the chaos and evil around him as evidence that God existed and that all the world must answer to Him. What he did showed that he was an heir of righteousness.

By faith we revere God so as to do the hard work He requires.

Faith Obeys God Immediately
(v.8)

The Word of God came to Abraham, telling him to leave the land he is in and to travel to a destination that would be identified later. By faith, Abraham obeyed and went, going to what was promised not knowing where it was.

This is the kind of call every person who becomes a Christian receives. The Word of God (now located in the Scriptures), tells us to leave our sins, our security, our safety, our wealth, our pleasures and to begin a risky, dangerous, hard, and joyful journey to another land. It is a place we do not know where it is, what it really looks like and getting there will eventually require dying. But, it is the land where God is,
where we will see and dwell with God, the land where all that He promises us will be fulfilled. And so, by faith, we believe and obey. We forsake houses and lands, if necessary family and friends and we head heavenward. And we patiently persevere and do not go back.

*By faith we are poised to obey God without hesitation no matter how hard it is.*

**Faith Sojourns Here Anticipatively (v.9-10)**

Abraham arrived and lived as a stranger and an alien in the very land he was promised. He witnessed to the temporary nature of living in the land by living in tents. After all, this was the Promised Land, but not yet. Do you see? Though he was an heir and owner, he was living in between the promise and the fulfillment. He lived it and so did his sons.

And so do we. We, like Abraham, are living in between the promise and fulfillment. This life we live now by faith, we live here constantly in transition, never really being settled down and at home. We, if you will, spiritually live in tents. We are sojourners, aliens, away from home. And we must pass this way of living on to our sons and daughters, to the next generation of believers.

What is it that drives this kind of living? Abraham lived his whole life, moving about in Israel, quietly marking off his heritage and the boundaries of his promise, while his gaze was fixed on the city God designs and builds. He lives with superb joy between the promise and the fulfillment because the eyes of his faith can see what God has promised and is still yet preparing. Because he is looking forward, he is neither distracted by the present nor tempted to return to what he has left.

Here is the lesson the author intends for us. Those whose faith leaves and lives with a strong sense of being a pilgrim will fix the gaze of their souls on their Redeemer and His heavenly reward. Because we are looking forward by faith to the fulfillment, we will persevere with grace enabled patience in the temptations to sin and the testing of suffering. What we have left we will not go back to. And what surrounds us now will not distract us. We will live now with our eyes set on Christ and our hearts fixed on heaven.

*By faith we live here in this world as pilgrims and aliens, looking forward to our heavenly home.*

**Faith Experiences Promises Presently (v.11-12)**

Sarah’s faith is grounded in the character of God. She heard a promise of her having a son. She carefully evaluated the faithfulness of God. She believed God and received the power to open her womb and bear a child. As is evident all through the Bible, the enabling power of God, that is, His grace, flows through faith to people.

Her consideration of the faithfulness of God is being highlighted. She studied and weighed the integrity of the God who made the promise (and yes, laughed at her own age and inability). But her belief was not just a fantasy wish, nor did it create the reality hoped for. It had content – you will bear a son. It had an object – a promising God who is truthful and faithful. It weighed carefully the impossibility of her situa-
tion and the greatness of her God, then believing that God was real and rewarded, she was intimate with her husband and got pregnant.

Here is the grand thing about this kind of faith – it may receive what is promised in the moment and it may bring an immeasurable result later. So through this faith in the faithful God who promised came first a son, Isaac and then, many sons. But greatest of all, later came the Son of God who is the fulfillment of what God promised. (Galatians 3:15-18). Even in this we have an already and not yet. Abraham and Sarah believe and receive a son, but not yet, not the Son who would be born thousands of years later.

By faith we can experience the power and faithfulness of God as He fulfills what He has promised.

**Faith Holds Fast Patiently** *(v.13-16)*

Our writer pauses at the center of this section to teach us something startling about faith. Most of these people in Genesis died without getting what they believed God for. Yet, their faith was real and it was rewarded. This will shake many Christians today. We assume that if we don’t get what was promised now, then something is faulty with our faith. Not so. Listen to what kind of faith these all died in.

It is a faith that can wait till after death for the fullness of what is promised (v.13). It knows that we are living between the promise and the fulfillment and perseveres until the fulfillment actually happens.

It is a faith that sees what God promises from a long way off. It welcomes it, or greets it from afar. Faith is like knowing your loved one is coming and you long for it and wait for it and welcome it and all of that makes the way you live now sweeter and better and fuller. But she is not home yet.

It is a faith that is seeking what is promised. Faith desires what is promised. So often our trouble is that we don’t really care about that which God has promised: we don’t long for it and hunger for it, so we don’t have it.

It is a faith that talks about these things so that there is real clarity about them in our souls. Faith confessed and discussed and lived profoundly shapes us for heavenly mindedness and earthly usefulness.

It is a faith that presses forward even when opportunities are there to return to the past way of living. Faith keeps firm grip and ever upward climbing the heavenward cast anchor.

In gathering together we are to stir up this kind of faith. We are to speak about God, His person, perfections and promises so that we see them in our souls. We welcome them even when we know they are afar off. We do this together because we are pilgrims and are living in spiritual tents. Then there will come that day when we will arrive at the homeland and all will be fulfilled.

So, God is not ashamed to be called their God. When we don’t bank our hope in God’s promises and live as though we need everything now and are not longing for heaven then we embarrass God. We bring Him shame. But when we live committed
to God’s promises, confessing that we are just passing through, that we are hungering and thirsting for our heavenly home, then we bring pleasure to God.

*By faith we can be commended even when, in this life, we do not receive what is promised.*

**Faith Passes Tests Submissively** *(v.17-19)*

Now, we need to think carefully about the testing of Abraham. By faith, when tested, Abraham obeyed. So what was this really a test of?

It was a test of Abraham’s *treasure*. Would he sacrifice what was nearest and dearest to his heart? Here is what God is testing: where is Abraham’s greatest treasure – is it God or is it Isaac? We all know child centered homes and people. Their children are their greatest treasures. It is evident because of what they will sacrifice and give up for their sake. It is evident from the trade-offs and compromises they make. It is evident from the emotions that boil up when their child is hurt, or challenged, or thwarted in some way. Family and children can be enormous treasures and they can become disobedience fueling idols. Yet here Abraham moves with a sense of sure poise. He simply rises up to obey God. So will we obey God when what we really treasure is being tested? Will we make the right choices that at times will look simply like having certain priorities?

It was a test of Abraham’s *trust*. Would he sacrifice what was clearly the promised one that God had given? Remember, Isaac is not just any child. He is the promised son. He is the one that he and Sarah had waited long years for. He is the direct result of the miraculous intervention of God through Abraham and Sarah’s faith. Sometimes faith is a matter of trusting in God, and sometimes it is a matter of trusting God.

Let me illustrate. Think of approaching a strange dog, a big, fearsome, growling dog. Do you trust that dog? It is in this sense that I think we often fail. We say we trust in God so we believe in Him – but we are not so sure that all points, we trust Him, we believe that He knows what He is doing. So, does Abraham trust God? Abraham’s obedience by faith is visible, is displayed through the test. Even more, the test is the opportunity for faith’s obedience. We will all be tested and tried. Our character, our likeness to Christ is shaped by the sharp application of the chisel of testing under the hammer of hardship. But it is guided by the Master Craftsman who is lovingly working to produce magnificent works of grace.

He had God’s promise and God’s precept. The only thing that Abraham could figure out was that God would have to raise Isaac from the dead. His faith, his belief had God’s promise of Isaac. And his faith had God’s command to sacrifice him. So his faith reasoned based on the faithfulness of God, on His integrity and His covenant keeping character. Since this son (not another one) was the son of promise and obedience would end that life, then faith rested in the life giving, resurrecting power of God.

*By faith we can pass the tests and trials God brings to examine and expose our hearts.*
Faith Comes to Death Gloriously (v.20-22)

Finally, in Genesis we see faith in the face of impending death. All three of these people do what they do on their deathbeds because they have heard, believed and embraced God’s promises. Faith here is not being tested, but is banking on the facts of God’s promises to say and do things that please God.

Isaac blessed seeing the person who would inherit the land. The blessing he inherited from Abraham he passed on to Jacob. His focus is on the great provision of God (Genesis 27:27-29). By faith, this dim sighted, near death patriarch, being deceived by a sinful son, serves God’s hidden purposes and blesses the younger instead of the older. His blessing is simply a transmission of God’s promise to Abraham to his son. He does so because he believes what God has said. What he says in the blessing highlights that God is one who provides.

Jacob blessed seeing the blessing that would come in the land. In Joseph’s place, he blesses his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. His focus is on the sure protection of God (Genesis 48:15-16). God has been His shepherd and his sustainer his whole life. Believing that God is like this and will keep his promises, he anticipates the fulfillment and blesses accordingly.

Joseph left instructions seeing that they actually would enter the land. His focus is on the delivering promises of God (Genesis 50:24-25). Here, Joseph’s faith believes that Egypt is not the homeland. He is so convinced of what God has promised and so confident that God will bring it to pass that he makes them promise to carry his bones out and to bury them in Canaan. So in the face of death, God’s promises are so real that he binds future generations to a promise of their own.

By faith we can come to the end of our lives and face death with hope and assurance.

Lessons

The faith of these people in Genesis shows why it pleases God. First, faith believes God exists. Second, faith believes that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Because faith is these two things, it pleases God. He doesn’t say why this is so. He just says it is. There is something about the nature of God that makes this obvious.

What pleases God is when we show by our life that God exists and that He is excellent. Our believing obedience displays how real God is and how rewarding He is. God is like this: it brings Him pleasure when we trust Him and when we treasure Him.

Here for me is one of the most important lessons about faith. The nature of faith and the vitality of faith are rooted in what God is like, not in what we are like. Faith is what it is because of what and who God is. The more you know what God is like, the more conformed to His greatness will be your faith. Your trusting obedience will have in it the essence of God’s promises and the evidence that He is real and He is rewarding.
The faith of these men and women in Genesis instructs us and illustrates for us that:

- By faith we believe that God created everything by His Word.
- By faith we come to God through the sacrifices He accepts, that is His Son, Jesus Christ.
- By faith we walk with God so as to be pleasing to Him.
- By faith we revere God so as to do the hard work He requires.
- By faith we are poised to obey God without hesitation no matter how hard it is.
- By faith we live here in this world as pilgrims and aliens, looking forward to our heavenly home.
- By faith we can experience the power and faithfulness of God as He fulfills what He has promised.
- By faith we can be commended even when, in this life, we do not receive what is promised.
- By faith we can pass the tests and trials God brings to examine and expose our hearts.
- By faith we can come to the end of our lives and face death with hope and assurance.

May God give us a commended faith, one that shows that God exists and that He is excellent. May we be a people who worship, walk and work by faith.

May God give us a commended faith, one that will believe in an obeying way even if we don’t receive what is promised until after we die. Then we will be the kind of people God is not embarrassed over, is not ashamed to be called, their God.
The Grandeur of God in Genesis

Introduction  How did your parents select your name?

Names in the Bible are often loaded with significance. We have seen this in Genesis. Jacob, the supplanter, is named Israel, the prevailer with God. Places are named as memorials to the life-changing events that took place there. Names invoke the character and reputation of a person.

Throughout Genesis, God is named. He names Himself, He is given names and He is called on by names. The unfolding revelation of the character and reputation of God is given through a growing succession of names. These names are how people are to know who He is.

He does not appropriate the names of the false gods worshipped by the peoples. He reveals Himself as distinct from and not be confused with the idols of man’s imaginations. He does not need relational bridges derived from the pantheon of gods. He is not one of many nor one of them. The very reality of God emerges through the words He has chosen to reveal Himself. He is Divine and distinct.

Yet, the life contexts in which the names are given ensure clarity. He is the God who stands apart from all that is created. He is also the God who intentionally engages the world He has made and particularly the people He loves.

So, we will glory in the Names of God in Genesis. Now a word – this is a very limited study. Many, many of the names of God in the Old Testament do not occur in Genesis. We will only be look at the ones that were revealed in Genesis. Yet, there are unfathomable riches for the lover of God and the learner of His Word.

Elohim – God, the Creator  Genesis 1:1; 17:7

The opening verse of the Bible brings us face-to-face with Elohim, the majestic creator. This is the most frequently used name for God in the Old Testament.

The Glory of the Name

The name reveals God as the mighty source of all, supreme over all that is. He is the designer, creator, governor and sustainer of all that is. He stands apart from and stands over the cosmos. He brought it into existence. He is not made. He simply is. He offers no proof of His existence. He immediately discloses Himself as the source and ground of our being. It is relatively insignificant what we decide about Him. What He decides about us all significant.
The name is unique in that it is plural. There is one God. The one God declares that His name is a plural. What does this mean?

It denotes an intensity. The plural is one meant to convey a strong intensity, a grand majesty.

It denotes a plurality. Now this must be a plurality in unity. There is some way, which the Bible unfolds, that God is plural. The Bible will unfold the one God as being Father, Son and Spirit. He is a tri-unity of three persons in one essence and being.

The name given by God to the people of God to whom He gives His covenants (Genesis 17:7). In establishing His covenant with His people, He calls on them to own Him as their God. “He will be Elohim to them.” All that He is in His great majestic name, He will be to His people. The name not only declares His transcendence, His great apartness and independence of all, but also His immanence, His connectedness to His people. He is majestic, almighty, creator, sustainer in and of Himself. He is majestic, almighty, creator, sustainer for His people.

The name is to be owned by the people of God who are the recipients of His covenants. They have the right, privilege and responsibility to call Elohim, their God. This means that they are the recipients of the all the good that God intends for them wrapped in the gift paper of His Name, Elohim.

The Use of the Name
This name will always appear in good English translations of the Old Testament as “God”. When we use word God in English to refer to the one true God, the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we are using the Elohim name of God. So we should keep in mind who this name says God is when we use this name, when we call Him God.

WE SEE HIM AS CREATOR AND WE ARE HUMBLED. We come to see our place before such a God. We can make no demands of Him. We are utterly dependent and accountable to Him. Calling Him Elohim bends my knee willingly and joyfully.

WE SEE HIM AS MAJESTIC AND WE ARE AWED. When owning Him as Elohim grips our soul, glad awe and amazement fills us. The mighty oceans of the sea of stars are but a small pond the unfathomable depths of Elohim. Worship flows from the soul filled with majesty of God, of Elohim.

WE SEE HIM AS MIGHTY AND WE ARE COMFORTED. When we own Him as God, His mightiness comforts us in our neediness. His power will complete what He has purposed and planned for us. In all the obstacles and set-backs that seem to litter the way, the almighty power of Elohim is moving to complete the good for His people.

WE SEE HIM AS OURS AND WE ARE CONNECTED. We are not only to recognize Him as God, but are exhorted on to call Him, “our God”. This is the possessive of being owned by someone. This is the claim of connectedness, of relationship. It is the depth of a multi-layered and many faceted relationship. What an extraordinary thing to be told by Elohim to say of Him, the intensely
majestic, almighty One, “our God”. This is not impertinent of us, but an imperative to us. It pleases Him when He is our God.

**El – God, the Strong**

God is strong. As the Almighty, we are shown God’s greatness over all in His divine essence. But as El, we are shown that the power of God. He is God, the Strong. He not only has the authority to do what ever He pleases, He also has the power to do whatever He pleases. He cannot be defeated. He is never thwarted. The obstacles that seem to bring setbacks in Genesis are just hurdles in redemptive history that demonstrate the amazing power, dexterity and perseverance of God.

This name is most often used hyphenated with other words to create a compound name for God. Alone, this name tells us that God is the most high one, owner of all and dispenser of all good. Thus He is both to be blessed as well as the blesser. Though out the Old Testament, many words are linked to El to create new names for God. Five of these names are revealed in Genesis.

### El-Elyon – The Most High

*Genesis 14:17-20*

This name of God first occurs alone in this text. Here Melchizedek, the King of Salem is identified as priest of El, of God Most High (v.18). Melchizedek comes out to greet the victorious Abraham, returning from battle. He speaks the great blessing of verses 19-20 centering it on this great name of God. Abraham is blessed by El, God Most High, who owns all things. And El, God Most High, is blessed in doing good for Abraham.

There is a very common mistake being made by Christians today. In order to feel blessed by God, we want God to come down and be on our level. But our being blessed by God and our blessing of God (praise to God) is sweeter and richer when God is elevated as He ought to be. In other words, I am blessed the most when I am blessed by the Most High God. So our recognition of the Most High does not cause us to fear, but to rejoice that one so High blesses one so low.

### El-Roi – The One Who Sees

*Genesis 16:13-14*

Sarah’s handmaiden, Hagar, has fled from Sarah and is here languishing in the desert. Sarah is jealous of her. Sarah had given her to Abraham to try to have a child. When Hagar conceived, it exposed Sarah as the reason they had no children. So Sarah, with Abraham’s permission, begins to treat her with contemptible harshness. Yet, here, God meets her and provides for her. He prophesies greatness for her son and sends her back home. He comforts her and commands her.

She names Him as the all seeing God. His absolute omniscience is a comfort to her. She is not hiding from God. She is rather aware of living before the face of God. His all seeing eye upon her is one of care and concern. He is the God who is watching over her. In His knowing her, he blesses her and sends her back to hardness. But in that hardness under Sarah’s hand, Hagar can live with contented assurance that God is watching over her and she is living before His face and under His eye.
This is huge for us. We tend to think of God’s all seeing eye as a causing fear and consternation. Yes, that God sees us ought to restrain our sin. But living before the face of God and under His eye means that we are in His care. He is watching over us. Now that does not mean that He is always moving to relieve us of our hardships. He may well send us back to the hardships we tend to flee from. But then, wherever we are, His loving eye is on us.

El-Olam – The Everlasting God

Genesis 21:33

Abraham was a wanderer. At times, this wandering was a kind of flitting from place to place. At times his wandering took him to surrounding nations as his faith and trust drooped. This comes to a head here in Genesis 21. Abraham has returned to Canaan from his wandering (Ch. 20). Ishmael is now out of his home and growing up out in the desert. A final treaty is signed with Abimelech resolving years of conflict over land and wells. In the midst of all this turmoil and uncertainty, in the midst of the changeableness of a pilgrim’s life, Abraham stakes out two certainties. He plants a tree in Beersheba as a testimony to what God has done. And he calls God, the everlasting One.

Pilgrims between the promise and the fulfillment need the certainty of an everlasting and unchanging God. While all around the winds of change blow the dusts of time, God is everlasting. He is unaffected by all the assaults us. His purposes are sure in heaven and earth because of who He is. Neither His character nor His cause is changed. He is a stable anchor for the soul.

We are going to need to increasingly depend on God, the everlasting God. I am certain that we are going to see unimaginable change in our lifetimes. The dark cloud of Islamic Fascism is being weakly resisted by the west. We may come to a place where Hebrews and 1 Peter and Revelation will be read with same soul-satisfying intensity that they have been in prior generations. Our pilgrimage here may soon be hard. And then, to call on God, the everlasting One! What a solace for our souls! What a refuge for our hearts!

El-Shaddai – The Almighty God

Genesis 17:1-2

God appears to Abraham to confirm and clarify His covenant. In doing so, He reveals Himself in announcing a new name. He is El-Shaddai, the Almighty God. Before one so great and almighty, Abraham must walk with openness and purity. Then God will unfold the blessings He has promised. Attended with that promise is a sign that the covenant has been accepted and is believed. The rite of circumcision is not commanded as a way to signify who god’s people are.

Shaddai is an interesting word. Its root was used to speak of the bounty of the breasts, the nursing care one gives to beloved infants. Yet it also spoke of strength and might. The joining of El, the strong one and Shaddai, the bountiful one, then describes God as great in His bounty. It mixes both strength and tenderness. It mixes the high sovereign greatness of deity and the affectionate care of a nursing mother. Rightly walking with God involves holding both of these as true together. Abraham must conceive of a mighty God. He also must conceive of a God who promises with loving bounty.
Ah, how we need this word for us today. Too many are down-slope either way. There are those who love to emphasize the tender love and nursing care of God. He is full of life giving sustenance. There are those who love to emphasize the mighty power and elevated greatness of God. He is full of holiness, authority and power. We must ever hold both of these as equally true. God’s people are blessed with both the greatness and the goodness of God. He is big and big in His bounty. Through His covenants, His promises to and for His people, that mighty bounty is secured and sure. What hope and assurance rises in our souls when we call on El-Shaddai, the Almighty God.

**El-Elohe Israel – The God of Israel**

*Genesis 33:18-20*

Jacob had returned safely home from Haran, bringing his wives, Rachel and Leah, his sons and all his wealth. He had been given a new name when he had met and wrestled with God. He had been reconciled with Esau. He now has bought a piece of land for his own. There, he pitches a tent. There, he builds an altar. There, he calls on El, the El of Israel, God, the God of Israel. Through all his trouble and trials, he affirms his relationship with God.

For Israel, this is significant. They need to know that though they sin, though they flee, though they wander, though they prosper and though they return to actually possess what was promised, God is their God. God is the God of His people. We are so used to this sense of mutual relationship that we often have the lost of it. The mighty One is the mighty One of and for His people. He is the God of Jacob. He is the God of Israel in the Old Testament. He is the God of Christians. He is the God of His people. Do you ever just revel in that? Is it ever just a wonder to you? Or have we become so used to the idea of having a relationship with God that we actually don’t have an engagement with God?

So, may you be awakened in your soul to all that the Mighty God is to you.

**Yahweh – The Lord, Who Is**

Yahweh is the Englishinization of the unpronounced and unspoken name of God. The Jews so reverenced this name that they stopped saying the name itself substituting Adonai in the public reading and teaching of the Old Testament. This turned the name of God into an idol. The names of God were not to be used or taken in vain—but those names were to be spoken in reading and teaching and discussing God. They were to be invoked in prayer and worship. In typical fallen fashion, the representation for God was elevated and actually revered more than God Himself. In older English Bibles, Puritan writings and hymns, this name is commonly translated into the English, Jehovah. Many resist the use of this as a translation for Yahweh. I have argued that it is as good a translation as any other. In fact, if we are going to have trouble with this, why call Yeshua, Jesus? I am content to speak of Yahweh or to sing, “Guide me O thou great Jehovah.”
Yahweh or Jehovah is the name that represents the ineffable existence of God. It means, the One who is. Moses at the burning bush is confronted by Yahweh who then says, “Tell Israel the I AM has sent you.” Yahweh is the self-existent, self-revealing, all-sufficient God. There is no argument for His existence. This name simply declares that He is, that He is the eternal present. In Him there is neither past nor future. Yahweh never was nor will be. Yahweh always is. The I AM is all He needs to say for us to remove our shoes and bow down for where that name is spoken and where the God of that name resides is holy ground.

The LORD God

This name for God is used around 311 times in Genesis alone. It is identifiable in our English Bibles by the LORD being in small caps. In the ESV (as in most good translations) it is translated LORD God. Often the name is combined with other words to broaden the name and reveal God in a richer, fuller way. Over the course of redemptive history, Yahweh disclosed Himself as the eternally existent One who is our shepherd, our righteousness, our warrior and so on. But here in Genesis, the emphasis is on the Yahweh as the name alone.

Why this emphasis? Because Moses wants to establish once and for all that the God of the Bible is the only God. He is sovereign and supreme. This message we need for today when our western culture is becoming more and more pluralistic. It is one thing to recognize that many religions exist. It is quite another to say that all religions are equal. There is only one true God. All the rest of the gods are false idols. Those who worship them are unbelievers and will die in their sins and face eternal condemnation in hell. We do them no favor by playing this down. We must not be cowed by political or cultural correctness. The great problem for mankind is God – His violated holiness and His eternal wrath. The LORD God, the eternal, existent One is God alone. Believe this, repent of your rebellion and bow to Him. Plea for mercy and seek the forgiveness that comes only through the doing and dying of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

The LORD Provides

Genesis highlights the hyphenated Yahweh name at the high point of the book. Abraham is passing the test of who is his first love. But greater than that, this story set the sacrifice of bulls and goats in their proper place. They are a substitute until the true sacrifice, the true and future son of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ comes. At the heart of all our sins are idols of the heart, things and people we love more than God. In the face of our falling short of the glory of God and not loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind, being and strength, God has dealt with our sin so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to Him.

On Mount Moriah, God provided Himself a lamb. Here the lamb takes the place of Isaac. On that same mountain, thousands of years later, the Lamb of God, the Son of God was sacrificed in our place. There God has provided for Himself, the final Lamb. Thus, Abraham calls the LORD God, Yahweh-Jireh (Jehovah-Jireh). God will be known as the One who provides. Yes, He will provide much for His people. But there will be not greater provision than when Yahweh-Jireh provides Himself the Lamb, the lamb slain for our sin.
Adonai – The Lord, our Master

In Genesis, this word is always plural when used to refer to God. It is not properly a name of God, but rather a title applied to God. It is a way of addressing God that shows deference to Him as master and king. The plural is one of intensity – Adonai is King of kings and Lord of lords. His lordship and kingship is ultimate, without peer. He is lord all the richest and royalist sense of the word. He is the One who rules me and to whom I owe allegiance (fealty) and obedience (love).

In our Struggles

Genesis 15:2ff

Abraham is struggling with perplexities. God is His shield and His great reward. Yet, one of the basic promises God has made has not yet been fulfilled and frankly makes a mockery of all the rest. But this is the Lord, the Master speaking. So he may ask God a question, but he may not question God. As he seeks for God to solve his perplexity, God announces that he will surely see the fulfillment of the promise of a son.

In our struggles, we may ask God questions, but we may not question God. He is the Lord and Master. He has the free sovereign right to do what ever pleases Him. He can fulfill His promises in His own time. But when it all seems confusing, God is still pleased when we humbly come and seek to know hat He is doing. Too many Christians in their struggles are questioning God. This is not allowed. If you have questions for the Master, you come with humbleness and sincerity. This is, after all, the Lord you are talking to!

In our Serving

Genesis 18:3ff

Abraham is here serving with hospitality. He has recognized the strangers on the road as heavenly guests. One he particularly treats with the respect and reverence usually reserved for God. When he invites them into his home, Abraham addresses them using this title, Adonai. It is difficult to know whether he is just being respectful to visitors or has recognized the Lord.

What we see here though is a concern to serve, in this case with hospitality. Initially, Abraham may be expressing the cultural norms for hospitality, but as this story unfolds, layer after layer of humility and discernment is peeled back. This sense of humility, of serving the Lord our Master, is the strong foundation for Christian ministry. We are not promoting ourselves. We are not pushing our agenda. We are not protecting our interests. We are performing service to our God who is our master.
As we close, let me point to some personal lessons and instructions to take away with you.

Let us humble ourselves under such a mighty God. His Names are meant to invoke awe and draw out worship. They reveal a mighty, sovereign, creating God who is our Lord and Master, sufficient and supreme in Himself.

Let us run with delighted joy towards such a great God. May the mighty Names of God ever be a source of help and hope in darkness. The mighty God meets us in our need with these magnificent names.

Let us rest in who God is through how God names Himself. He is all we need. He has given Himself to us in His Names so that we will cling to Him and hope in Him.

All the names of God find their grandest fulfillment and greatest expression in our Lord Jesus. He is all that God has revealed Himself to be. And above all the names in all creation, God has given Him a Name that at His Name all will bow.

Isaac Watts wrote a great old hymn I want to quote in closing: *Join all the Glorious Names.*

Join all the glorious names
Of wisdom, love, and power,
That ever mortals knew,
That angels ever bore:
All are too mean to speak His worth,
To poor to set my Savior forth.
Great Prophet of my God,
My tongue would bless Thy Name,
By Thee the joyful news
Of our salvation came,
The joyful news of sin forgiv’n
Of hell subdued, and peace with Heav’n.
Be Thou my Counsellor,
My Pattern, and my Guide,
And through this desert land

Still keep me near thy side:
Nor let my feet e’er run astray
Nor rove nor seek the crooked way.
Jesus, my great High Priest,
Offered His blood, and died;
My guilty conscience seeks
No sacrifice beside:
His powerful blood did once atone,
And now it pleads before the throne.
My dear almighty Lord,
My Conqueror and my King,
Thy scepter and Thy sword,
Thy reigning grace I sing:
Thine is the power; behold I sit
In willing bonds beneath Thy feet.

May our hearts rise up to join all the glorious names that God is richly known by for our good and His great glory.
Outlines

Chapter Outlines

The following are the outlines for the studies. They are intended to be used as a guide for those who are studying along with the text itself.
Introduction

Tapestry – Its Place in the Scripture

Its Maker – the Biblical Author

Its Fabric – the Foundational Materials

Its Design – the Structural Makeup

Tol*Dots – The Physical Arrangement

Chiasms – The Literary Arrangement

Motifs – The Thematic Arrangement

Its Audience – the Intentional Message

Immediate Target – Israel

Wider Spectators – Gentiles
Long-Term Audience – God’s People

Trajectory – Its Place in Redemptive History

Its Foundational Importance

Its Christological Center

Its Eschatological Aim

Its Practical Use

For our Instruction

For our Illustration

Personal Reflection and Application

- How does my understanding of this text affect my worship and my walk?
Introduction

Development around the Text

Issues in the Text

Approach to the Text

Prologue (v.1-2)

Summary (v.1)

State (v.2)

Structure – Order and Form

Day One – Light and Darkness (v.3-5)

Day Two – Space and Earth (v.6-8)

Day Three – Seas and Land (v.9-13)
Inhabitants – Fullness and Fruitfulness (v.14-31)

Day Four – Dwells in Space and Heavens (v.14-19)

Day Five – Dwells in the Seas and Sky (v.20-23)

Day Six – Dwells in the Earth and Garden (v.24-31)

Sabbath – Completion and Rest (2:1-3)

Form and Fill Completed (v.1)

Rest and Reward Enjoyed (v.2-3)

Conclusion

Personal Reflection and Application

- How does my understanding of this text affect my worship and my walk?

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The Garden & Companions
Genesis 2:4-25
Pastor Russ • Chapel Pulpit • November 21, 2004. Sunday Morning

Requests for tapes or questions about this message may be directed to the church office at (937) 885-2143 or e-mail Pastor Russ at PastorRuss@ClearcreekChapel.org. Pastor Russ uses the English Standard Version in his preaching and teaching.

Introduction

The Garden (v.5-17)

Its Surrounding Circumstances (v.5-7)

As to the General Environment (v.5-6)

As to the Creation of Man (v.7)

Its Divine Creation (v.8-9)

Its Strategic Centrality (v.10-14)

Its Related Commands (v.15-17)

As to Adam’s Responsibilities (v.15)

As to Adam’s Restriction (v.16-17)
The Companions

The Evident Need

The Wonderful Provision

The Scriptural Lessons

Lessons

Personal Reflection and Application

- How does my understanding of this text affect my worship and my walk?
The Commencement of Sin

(v.1-7)

The Person of the Tempter

(v.1)

The Presentation of the Temptation

(v.2-6)

Through Lies Directed at the Heart Beliefs

(v.2-5)

Satan questions God’s Word

(v.1)

Eve changes God’s Word

(v.2-3)

Satan challenges God’s Word

(v.4-5)

Through Lusts Directed at the Heart Wants

(v.6)

Temptation appeals through a physical medium, sees.
Temptation *appeals to* the wants of the heart, *desires.*

Temptation *appeals in* thematic heart elements.

*The Product of the Temptation*  
(v.7)

Sin Resulting from Disobedience

Shame Resulting from Guilt

*The Confrontation of Sin*  
(v.8-13)

*Engages through Relationship*  
(v.8)

*Exposes through Questions*  
(v.9-13)

Questions around broken relationships  
(v.9-10)

Questions examining evidences of guilt  
(v.11a)

Questions about the facts of sin  
(v.11b-12)

Questions requiring self-accusation  
(v.13).
The Condemnation of Sin (v.14-19)

The Curse affecting Satan (v.14-15)

The Curse affecting Eve (v.16)

The Curse affecting Adam (v.17-19)

The Consequences of Sin (v.20-24)

The Expectation because of Sin (v.20-21)

The Expulsion because of Sin (v.22-24)

Driven from the Garden.

Denied access to the Garden
Lessons

Personal Reflection and Application

- How does my understanding of this text affect my worship and my walk?
Introduction

Prolog – The Anticipation through Sons

The Aspiration in the Brothers (v.1-2a)

The Association of the Brothers (v.2b)

The Sacrifice of Cain (v.1-7)

Their Gifts

God’s Rejection (v.4b-5a)

God’s Warning (v.5b-7)

A Question over Responses

A Call to Repentance
A Warning against Danger

The Sin of Cain (v.8-16)

In his Commission (v.8)

In his Confrontation (v.9-12)

In his Consequences (v.11-12)

In his Complaint (v.13-15)

In his Contempt (v.16)

The Sons of Cain (v.17-24)

Rejection of a Just Punishment (v.17)

Introduction of Polygamous Marriage (v.18-19)

Initiation of a Diverse Culture (v.20-22)

Assertion of an Arrogant Impunity (v.23-24)
Epilog – The Appointment of a Son (v.25-26)

*God Provides a Son* (v.25)

*Man Calls on God* (v.26)

Lessons
Personal Reflection and Application

- How does my understanding of this text affect my worship and my walk?
The Corruption: The Spread of Sin
Genesis 5:1-6:8
Pastor Russ • Chapel Pulpit • February 6, 2005. Sunday Morning

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Introduction

Chronology
– The Establishment of the Redeemer's Line (5:1-32)

Its History

Its Highlights

Adam – The Transmission of Humanity (v.1-3)

Enoch – The Example of Holiness (v.21-24)

Noah – The Expectation of Hope (v.28-32)
Corruption
  – The Attack on the Redeemer’s Line (6:1-5)
    Its Pollution (v.1-4)

    Its Pervasiveness (v.5)

Condemnation
- the Preservation of the Redeemer’s Line (v.6-8)
    Its Sorrow (v.6)

    Its Sentence (v.7)

    Its Savior (v.8)

Lessons
Introduction

A  God Purposes to Punish the World  (6:11-13)

B  Noah Builds the Ark  (6:14-22)

C  The Remnant Enters the Ark  (7:1-9)

D  The Flood Begins  (7:10-16)
E  The Flood Prevails  (7:17-24)

F  God Remembers Noah  (8:1a)

- The Flood Recedes  (8:1b-5)
- The Earth Dries  (8:6-14)
- The Remnant Leaves the Ark  (8:15-19)
- Noah Builds an Altar  (8:20)
- God Purposes to Preserve the World  (8:21-22)

Lessons
Introduction

A  God Purposes to Punish the World  (6:11-13)
B  Noah Builds the Ark  (6:14-22)
C  The Remnant Enters the Ark  (7:1-9)
D  The Flood Begins  (7:10-16)
E  The Flood Prevails  (7:17-24)
F  God Remembers Noah  (8:1a)

e  The Flood Recedes  (8:1b-5)

d  The Earth Dries  (8:6-14)
c  The Remnant Leaves the Ark  (8:15-19)

b  Noah Builds an Altar  (8:20)

a  God Purposes to Preserve the World  (8:21-22)

Lessons
Introduction

Noah and His God (v.1-17)

The Commands to Noah (v.1-7)

For the Propagation of Human Life (v.1-4)

For the Protection of Human Life (v.5-7)

The Covenant with Noah (v.8-17)

Its Significance

Its Signatories

Its Stipulations

Its Sign
Noah and His Family (v.17-28)

Noah’s Problem (v.20-24)

Noah’s Prophecy (v.25-27)

The Curse on Canaan

The Blessing on Shem and Japheth

Lessons

Redemptive history selects events to serve thematic purposes.

We have few categories today that help us see how terrible Ham’s sin was.

Small sins may have far-reaching consequences.

The Bible has a high regard for sobriety, modesty and parental honor.

Conclusion
Introduction

The Spread of the Nations
Genesis 10-11
Pastor Russ • Chapel Pulpit • March 6, 2005 • Sunday Morning

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The Division of the Nations (Ch 10)

The Line of Japheth

The Line of Ham

The Line of Shem

The Dispersion of the Nations (11:1-9)

Their Rebellion (v.2-4)

God’s Response (v.5-7)

The Results (v.8-9)
The Descendants of Blessing (v.10-26)

The Shape of the Text

The Sense of the Text

Lessons
Introduction

The Situation in Abraham’s Past (11:27-32)

His Family Relations (v.27-30)

His Settled Residence (v.31-32)

His Inherited Religion (v.27-30)

The Obedience of Abraham’s Faith (12:1-9)

God’s Word Calls (v.1-3)

Abraham’s Faith Obeys (v.4-6)

Abraham’s Fellowship Deepens (v.6-9)
The Trouble of Abraham’s Failure  (v.10-20)

Abraham’s Fearful Deceit  (v.10-13)

Pharaoh’s Wrongful Marriage  (v.14-16)

God’s Decisive Intervention  (v.17-20)

Lessons
The Generous Worshipper
Genesis 13
Pastor Russ • Chapel Pulpit • March 20, 2005 Sunday Morning

Introduction

Riches and its Conflict (v.1-7)

The Advances by Faith (v.1-4)

The Obstacle of Conflict (v.5-7)

Resolution and its Choices (v.8-13)

The Generous Offer (v.8-9)

The Greedy Choice (v.10-11)

The Grave Results (v.12-13)
Reaffirmation and its Covenant (v.14-18)

God is Faithful to His Word (v.14-17)

Abram is Faithful to His God (v.18)

Lessons
Introduction

The Great Battles (v.1-16)

The Conquest by the Eastern Kings (v.1-7)

The Capture of Lot in Sodom (v.8-12)

The Chase by Abram (v.13-16)

The Glorious Blessing (v.17-24)

The Receipt of the Blessing (v.17-20)

His Identity

His Authority
His Hospitality

His Office

His Blessing

*The Response to the Blessing*  
(v.20b-24)

In What He Gives  
(v.20b)

In What He Refuses  
(v.21-24)

*The Role of the Blesser*  
Hebrews 7

Lessons
The Righteous Believer

Genesis 15

Pastor Russ • Chapel Pulpit • April 10, 2005. Sunday Morning

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Introduction

The Reward for the Faithful (v.1-5)

A The Covenant Grounded in God (v.1)

B The Concern arising from Faith (v.2-3)

C The Confirmation through a Symbol (v.4-5)

The Righteousness by Faith (v.6)

In its Old Covenant Context

In its New Testament Uses

Justified by Faith Romans 4:9-24

By Faith not Law Galatians 3:6

By an Authentic Faith James 2:23
In its Present Application

The Reality for the Future (v.7-21)

A The Covenant Grounded in God (v.7)

B The Concern arising from Faith (v.8)

C The Confirmation through a Symbol (v.9-21)

Lessons
Introduction

Sarah – the Reliance on Human Wisdom (v.1-6)

In her Challenge (v.1)

In her Counsel (v.2-4)

In her Complaint (v.5-6)

Hagar – the Revelation of Divine Grace (v.7-14)

In God’s Pursuit (v.7-9)

In a Prophecy (v.10-12)

In Her Perception (v.13-14)
Ishmael – The Rebuke of Impatient Waiting (v.15-16)

In his Birth

In his Name

In his Future

Lessons
Introduction

God’s People are Challenged (v.1-3)

In Who He is (v.1-2)

In What He Requires

In How We Respond (v.3)

God’s People are Changed (v.4-21)

By Affirming His Promises (v.4-8)

By Establishing their Relationship (v.9-14)

By Correcting their Weaknesses (v.15-21)
God's People are Compliant (v.22-27)

In Personal Obedience

In Painful Obedience

In Perfect Obedience

Lessons
Introduction

Fellowship with God (v.1-21)

Communion – A Covenantal Meal (v.1-8)

Conversation – A Covenantal Promise (v.9-15)

Confidant – A Covenantal Sharing (v.16-21)

Intercession with God (v.22-33)

Character – The Justice of God (v.22-25)

Compassion – The Mercy of God (v.26-33)
Lessons
Introduction

Lot’s Wonderful Deliverance (v.1-22)

A Hospitable Provision (v.1-3)

A Terrible Perversion (v.4-11)

A Disregarded Pronouncement (v.12-14)

A Fleeing Protection (v.15-22)
Righteous Lot
Genesis 19

Sodom's Mighty Destruction (v.23-29)

With Lot's Wife's Penalty (v.23-26)

From Abraham's Perspective (v.27-28)

By God's Power (v.29)

Daughter's Terrible Depravity (v.30-38)

Their Wicked Plan (v.30-35)

Their Lasting Progeny (v.36-38)

Lessons
Introduction

Confrontation: An Intervention Bringing Change (v.1-7)

*Its Repeated Failure* (v.1-2)

*Its Dramatic Warning* (v.3-5)

*Its Divine Instruction* (v.6-7)

Submission: An Obedience Exposing Sin (v.8-13)

*Its Probing Questions* (v.8-10)

*Its Revealing Answers* (v.11-13)
Thematic Heart Issues

Deceit and Lying

Planning for our Sins

Habitual/Enslavement by our Sins

Declaration: A Vindication Leading to Ministry (v.14-18)

Its Generous Pronouncement (v.14-16)

Its Intercessory Prayer (v.17-18)

Lessons
Introduction

In the Midst of Personal Blessing  
(v.1-7)

God’s Direct Intervention  
(v.1-2)

Abraham’s Practical Obedience  
(v.3-4)

Sarah’s Evident Joy  
(v.5-7)

In the Midst of Family Conflict  
(v.8-21)

Its Initial Problem  
(v.8-9)

Its Difficult Responses  
(v.10-14)

Its Divine Providence  
(v.15-21)

Its Practical Application
In the Testing of Strategic Relationships  (v.22-34)

By Lasting Commitments  (v.22-24)

By Settling Differences  (v.25-32)

By Acknowledging God  (v.33-34)

Lessons
God Testing His People
Genesis 22:1-19
Pastor Russ • Chapel Pulpit • July 31, 2005 • Sunday Morning

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God Testing His People

Introduction

God’s People are Tested through Sacrifice (v.1-2)

It Calls for Obedience

It Exposes the Heart

It Tests What is Loved

God’s People Obey by Faith (v.3-10)

It is a Practical Obedience (v.3)

It is a Persevering Obedience (v.4-8)

It is a Perfect Obedience (v.9-10)
God’s People Trust God  (v.11-14)

   In the Greatness of God  (v.11-12)

   In the Character of God  (v.13-14)

God’s People Receive Hope-Giving Assurance  (v.15-19)

   From the Word of God  (v.15-18)

   For a Confidence in God  (v.19)

Lessons
Introduction

The Terrible Reality of Facing Death (v.1-2)

As Experiences of Loss (v.1-2)

With Expressions of Grief (v.2)

The Simple Responsibilities of our Faith (v.3-16)

In a Request for a Burial Plot (v.3-9)

In a Negotiation for Ownership (v.10-15)

In a Finalization of the Purchase (v.16)

The Glorious Anticipation of Future Fulfillments (v.17-20)

In Present Preparations

With Future Hopes
Lessons
Introduction

Listening through the Story

A Commission for a Servant (v.1-9)

An Obedient Dependence on God (v.10-28)

A Humble Appeal in Boldness (v.29-49)

A Gracious Granting of the Request (v.50-60)

A Joyful Union in Marriage (v.61-67)

Bringing the Story Home

Faithfulness, the Central Theme

Abraham acts with faithfulness to God’s covenant.
The servant acts with faithfulness to his promise to Abraham.

Rebekah responds with faithfulness to the promises of marriage.

God acts with faithfulness to His character and promises.

_Providence, the Focus of Trust_

_Dependence, the Highlighted Characteristic_

Lessons
Introduction

Growing Old with Grace (v.1-18)

Providing for His Own (v.1-6)

Going Home to God (v.7-11)

Settling Outside the Homeland (v.12-18)

Giving Birth with Pain (v.19-34)

Situations that are Difficult (v.19-21)

Struggles that Need Help (v.22-23)

Sons who are Different (v.24-28)
Lessons
Introduction

Hearing the Story

A Jacob Prepares/Plots (v.29a)

B Esau Arrives (v.29b)

C Esau Demands to Eat (v.30)

D Jacob Requires Him to Sell (v.31)

E Esau Disparages His Birthright (v.32)

D Jacob Requires Him to Swear (v.33)

C Esau Proceeds to Eat (v.34a)

B Esau Departs (v.34b)

A Esau Despises (v.34c)
Crossing the Bridge

*People live out of their hearts.*

*People often allow their appetites to control them.*

*Wanting even a good thing too much will cause you to sin.*

*Jesus is contrast to both Jacob and Esau.*

*God is sovereign even over our sin.*

Lessons
Introduction

In our Pilgrimage (v.1-5)

With its Challenges (v.1)

With God’s Commands (v.2)

With God’s Covenants (v.3-5)

In our Problems (v.6-25)

When Others Seem to Threaten (v.6-11)

When Others are Jealous (v.12-16)

When Others Steal (v.17-25)
In our Promotions (v.26-33)

Recognition of God’s Blessing

Relationship with God’s People

Lessons
Introduction

Marriage - Opening and Closing Scenes

Disobedience – Marrying the Hittites (26:34-35)

Defiance – Marrying an Ishmaelite (28:6-9)

Scene 1 – Isaac Intends to Bless Esau (v.1-4)

   His Physical Decline

   His Personal Disobedience

Scene 2 – Rebekah Plots for Isaac (v.5-17)

   Her Wicked Plan (v.5-10)

   His Hesitant Response (v.11-13)

   Their Terrible Fraud (v.14-17)
Scene 3 – Isaac Blesses his Sons (v.18-40)

Jacob’s Deception (v.18-29)

Esau’s Distress (v.30-40)

Scene 4 – Jacob Flees Esau’s Anger (27:41-28:5)

Rebekah Warns Him (v.41-45)

Rebekah Protects Him (v.46)

Isaac Sends Him (28:1-5)

Lessons
Introduction

An Act of Divine Grace (v.10-15)

Heaven and Earth Connected for His People (v.10-12)

God Revealing Himself to His People (v.13)

God Promising Good to His People (v.13b-15)

A Response of Humbled Repentance (v.16-19)

Experienced in the Fear of God (v.16-17)

Expressed in the Sacrifice to God (v.18-19)

A Promise of Grateful Worship (v.20-22)

In a Prayer of Dependence

In a Commitment to Give
Lessons
Introduction

In Willing Service to Others (v.1-14)

Careful Confrontation of the Shepherds (v.1-8)

Gallant Assistance for Rachel (v.9-12)

Glad Meeting with Laban (v.13-14)

With Painfully Pointed Correction (v.15-30)

In the Pursuit of Blessing (v.15-19)

In the Reaping of Harvest (v.20-25)

In the Mess of Complications (v.26-30)
Lessons
Introduction

The Unloved Blessed by God (29:31-35)

Her Dependence upon God

Her Progression of Sons

Her Expressions of Pain

The Rivals Contending for Preeminence (30:1-18)

In the Use of their Handmaids

In the Trading of Favors
The Births Concluding the Family (30:19-24)

In Leah's Great Endowment (v.19-21)

In Rachel's Lifted Reproach (v.22-24)

Lessons
Introduction

In Bargaining for Advantage (v.25-34)

The Contract Fulfilled (v.25-26)

The Blessing Acknowledged (v.27-30)

The Agreement Struck (v.31-34)

In Maneuvering for Advantage (v.35-43)

The Crafty Separation of the Herds (v.35-36)

The Skillful Breeding of the Herds (v.37-43)
In Acknowledging God's Intervention (31:1-16)

The Ruining of the Relationship (v.1-3)

The Rehearsal of God's Favor (v.4-13)

The Response of the Family (v.14-16)

Lessons
Introduction

A Secret Departure (v.17-21)

With Complete Household (v.17-18)

With Aggravating Circumstances (v.19)

With Misdirecting Actions (v.20-21)

An Immediate Pursuit (v.22-24)

With Dangerous Intent (v.22-23)

With Divine Warning (v.24)
An Outraged Confrontation (v.25-42)

With Manipulative Attacks (v.25-30)

With Righteous Indignation (v.31-32)

With Fruitless Searching (v.33-35)

With Angry Accusations (v.36-42)

A Resolving Covenant (v.43-55)

With Dishonest Assertions (v.43-44)

With Family Threats (v.45-50)

With Territorial Promises (v.51-54)

With Peaceful Departure (v.55)

Lessons
Facing Up To Consequences
Genesis 32-33
Dan Turner • Chapel Pulpit • 2/26/2006 Sunday Morning

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Introduction

Fearing the Consequences of our Sins Genesis 32:1-21

In the Presence of God (v.1-2)

In the Plea to Esau (v.3-8)

In the Prayer to God (v.9-12)

In the Plans for Morning (v.13-21)

Submitting to the Conquering of our Sovereign Genesis 32:22-32

Confronted by the Lord

Changed by the Lord

Crippled by the Lord
Seeking the Correction for our Resolution  

Genesis 33

Jacob’s Humble Approach  
(v.1-3)

Esau’s Surprising Grace  
(v.4-14)

God’s Enduring Name  
(v.15-20)

Lessons
Introduction

A Wicked Defilement (v.1-12)

Its Terrible Cause (v.1-4)

Its Weak Response (v.5-7)

Its Proposed Solution (v.8-12)

A Treacherous Deceit (v.13-24)

Its Cunning Proposal (v.13-17)

Its Dishonest Presentation (v.18-24)
A Vengeful Destruction (v.25-31)

Its Terrible Slaughter (v.25-29)

Its Troubling Responses (v.30-31)

Lessons
Introduction

The Mingled Experience of the Righteous  

The Sweetness of Obedience and Blessing  

Genesis 35  

The Blessing of Purity (v.1-4)  

The Blessing of Protection (v.5-8)  

The Blessing of Prominence (v.9-15)  

The Sorrows of Disobedience and Death (35:16-29)  

The Mingling of Birth and Death (v.16-21)
The Mingling of Sins and Sons (v.22-26)

The Mingling of Separation and Reconciliation (v.27-29)

The Surprising Prosperity of the Wicked

*His Personal Success* (36:1-8)

*His Tribal Success* (36:9-41)

Lessons
Introduction

From a Privileged Position (v.2-11)

A Father’s Favor Provokes Rivalry (v.2-4)

A Dream of Ruling Provokes Hatred (v.5-8)

A Dream of Submission Provokes Jealousy (v.9-11)

To a Terrible Betrayal (v.12-28)

In the Providence of God (v.12-17)

With a Murderous Intent (v.18-24)

By a Shameful Act (v.25-28)
With a Deceitful Cover-Up (v.29-36)

In a Vile Conspiracy (v.29-33)

By a Dishonest Comfort (v.34-35)

With a Dreadful Consequence (v.36)

Lessons
Introduction

A Drift into Worldly Values (v.1-11)

In His Disallowed Marriage (v.1-5)

In His Extended Family (v.6-10)

In His Deceiving Fear (v.11)

A Disgrace by Sexual Sin (v.12-23)

Through a Clever Entrapment (v.12-19)

With a Failed Agreement (v.20-23)
A Disclosure in Humbled Chastening  
By the Consequence of Sin  
With a Self-Righteous Indignation  
To a Confession of Wrong

A Descendent through Difficult Births  
With Evocative Trouble  
To Continue the Lineage

Lessons
Introduction

Faithfulness Leads to Greater Responsibility  
(v.1-6a)

In a Difficult Place, Slavery

With a Rising Position, Authority

To a Growing Prosperity, Blessing

Faithfulness Enables Sin’s Resistance  
(v.6-18)

Against a Persistent Temptation, Refusal  
(v.6-10)

In an Aggressive Seduction, Flight  
(v.11-12)

With a False Accusation, Ruin  
(v.13-18)
Faithfulness is not Always Rewarded (v.19-23)

In an Unjust Punishment, Humility (v.19-20)

In a Terrible Circumstance, Grace (v.21-23)

Lessons
The Ups and Downs of God’s Providence

Genesis 40

Russ Kennedy • Chapel Pulpit • 4/23/2006 • Sunday Morning

Introduction

A Change: Meeting in Difficult Times (v.1-4)

B Care: The Inquiry into the Dreams (v.5-8)

C Encouragement: Cupbearer’s Dream (v.9-13)

D Appeal: The Plea to be Remembered (v.14-15)

C Warning: The Baker’s Dream (v.16-19)

B Success: The Fulfillment of the Dreams (v.20-22)

A Pain: Being Forgotten in Good Times (v.23)
Lessons
Introduction

The Occasion of His Rise (v.1-36)

In the Troubling Dreams (v.1-8)

With a Timely Recommendation (v.9-13)

By a Troubled Report (v.14-24)

As an Authorized Interpreter (v.25-32)

As a Wise Counselor (v.33-36)
The Outworking of His Rise (v.37-57)

In the High Appointment (v.37-45)

By the Wise Implementation (v.46-49)

With the Delights of Family (v.50-52)

Until the Devastating Famine (v.53-57)

Lessons
Introduction

A Change: Meeting in Difficult Times (v.1-4)

B Care: The Inquiry into the Dreams (v.5-8)

C Encouragement: Cupbearer’s Dream (v.9-13)

D Appeal: The Plea to be Remembered (v.14-15)

C Warning: The Baker’s Dream (v.16-19)

B Success: The Fulfillment of the Dreams (v.20-22)

A Pain: Being Forgotten in Good Times (v.23)
Lessons
Introduction

**Their Terrible Circumstances** (v.1-5)

*The Famine in their Land*

*The Fear in their Hearts*

**Their Alarming Confrontation** (v.6-17)

*The Accusation of a Crime* (v.6-9)

*The Protests of their Innocence* (v.10-11)

*The Test of their Statements* (v.12-17)
Their Awakened Consciences (v.18-25)

The Probing of their Hearts (v.18-20)

The Stirring of their Guilt (v.21-22)

The Binding of their Brother (v.23-25)

Their Troubling Concerns (v.26-33)

Their Disturbing Discovery (v.26-28)

Their Faithful Report (v.29-34)

Their Father's Distress (v.35-38)

Lessons
Introduction

The Testing of their Jealousy

Chapter 43

Through the Preparation for the Journey (43:1-14)

The Difficult Struggle over Returning (v.1-7)

The Noble Pledge for Safety (v.8-10)

The Ample Provision under Mercy (v.11-14)

In the Summons before Joseph (43:15-25)

Their Call to the House (v.15-17)

Their Fear for the Motivation (v.18-22)

Their Assurances from the Steward (v.23)

Their Preparations for the Meal (v.24-25)
With the Companionship around the Table

- The Assurances by his Greeting (v.26-28)
- The Compassion for his Brother (v.29-30)
- The Strangeness of his Setting (v.31-34)

The Testing of their Fidelity

Chapter 44

By the Accusation against the Brothers (44:1-17)

- The Framing of Benjamin (v.1-2)
- The Confrontation by the Steward (v.3-13)
- The Accusation by Joseph (v.14-17)

In The Appeal from Judah (44:18-34)

- The Love for His Father (v.18-29)
- The Substitution for his Brother (v.30-34)
Introduction

Reconciliation: the Progress of Souls (45:1-28)

From a Startling Confession (v.1-3)

With a Humble Reunion (v.4-15)

In a Generous Proposition (v.16-20)

By a Gracious Direction (v.21-28)


By a Divine Assurance (v.1-4)

Upon a Grand Arrival (v.5-7)

With a Significant Enumeration (v.8-26)
Lessons
Protection and Provision
Genesis 47

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Introduction

The Interaction with a Pagan King (v.1-18)

In the Procuring of His Favor (v.1-6)

In the Presenting of His Father (v.7-18)

The Provision for a Pagan People (v.19-26)

In the Selling of the Larder/Largesse (v.13-19)

In the Purchase of the Land (v.20-22)

In the Making of the Law (v.23-26)
The Protection for God’s People (v.27-31)

In the Prosperity of his People (v.27-28)

In the Promise to his Father (v.29-31)

Lessons
Faith in Mature Saints
Genesis 48-49
Russ Kennedy • Chapel Pulpit • 7/9/2006  Sunday Morning

Introduction

Acknowledges the Promises of God (v.1-7)

In the Word from God (v.3-4)

In the Kindness of Grace (v.5-6)

In the Midst of Grief (v.7)

Acknowledges the Purposes of God (v.8-20)

By His Adoption of the Boys (v.8-14)

By His Blessing on the Son (v.15-16)

By His Elevation of the Younger (v.17-20)
Acknowledges the Providences of God (v.21-22)

With the Presence of the Lord (v.21)

With the Present of the Land (v.22)

Lessons
Introduction

The Disqualified  
(v.1-7)

By Impatience and Immorality  
(v.3-4)

By Anger and Vengeance  
(v.5-7)

The Exalted  
(v.8-12)

In his Praise  
(v.8)

In his Power  
(v.9)

In his Position  
(v.10)

In his Person  
(v.11-12)
The Prosperous (v.13-21)

In their Strategic Location (v.13)

In their Vigorous Work (v.14-15)

In their Eroding Judgeship (v.16-18)

In their Valiant Warriors (v.19)

In their Skilled Farming (v.20)

In their Military and Verbal Prowess (v.21)

The Valiant (v.27)

The Blessed (v.22-26)

In his Fruitfulness (v.22)

In his Faithfulness (v.23-24)

In his Favoredness (v.25-26)
Introduction

Mourning in Hope (49:28-50:14)

Faith in the Dying (49:28-33)

Faith in the Grieving (50:1-14)

Comfort in Submission (50:15-21)

The Heart of Fear (v.15-18)

The Heart of Trust (v.19-21)

Direction in Expectation (50:22-26)

The Richness of his Life (v.22-23)

The Instruction upon his Death (v.24-25)

The Anticipation of his Return (v.26)
Conclusion
**Christ in Genesis**  
**Luke 22:**  
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Creator of the Universe</strong></td>
<td><em>Genesis 2:4</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Seeker of the Fallen</strong></td>
<td><em>Genesis 3:1-20</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Future Victor</strong></td>
<td><em>Genesis 3:11-15</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Ark of Safety in Judgment</strong></td>
<td><em>Genesis 6:11-22</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Seal of God’s Covenant Good</strong></td>
<td><em>Genesis 9:8-17</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Abrahamic Descendent</strong></td>
<td><em>Genesis 17:1-8</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Lamb until the Son</strong></td>
<td><em>Genesis 22:9-18</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Ladder to Heaven</strong></td>
<td><em>Genesis 28:10-17</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Mistreated Brother</strong></td>
<td><em>Genesis 37:25-28</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Servant of God’s Great Purposes</strong></td>
<td><em>Genesis 50:15-21</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**
Christ in Genesis
Luke 22:
Introduction

Faith that Accepts God’s Word Implicitly (v.3)

Faith that Comes to God Acceptably (v.4)

Faith that Walks with God Commendably (v.5-6)

Faith that Fears God Reverently (v.7)

Faith that Obeys God Immediately (v.8)

Faith that Sojourns Here Anticipatively (v.9-10)

Faith that Experiences Promises Presently (v.11-12)

Faith that Holds Fast Patiently (v.13-16)

Faith that Passes Tests Submissively (v.17-19)

Faith that Comes to Death Gloriously (v.20-22)

Conclusion
The Grandeur of God in Genesis
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Introduction

Elohim – God, the Creator

The Glory of the Name

The Use of the Name

El – God, the Strong

El-Elyon – The Most High
Genesis 14:17-20

El-Roi – The One Who Sees
Genesis 16:13-14

El-Olam – The Everlasting God
Genesis 21:33

El-Shaddai – The Almighty God
Genesis 17:1-2

El-Elohe Israel – The God of Israel
Genesis 33:18-20
Yahweh – The **LORD**, Who Is

*The **LORD** God*  
*Genesis 2:4*

*The **LORD** Provides*  
*Genesis 22:14*

Adonai – The Lord, our Master

*In our Struggles*  
*Genesis 15:2ff*

*In our Serving*  
*Genesis 18:3ff*

Conclusion