

9-29-1991

## Where Genesis Meets Life: Promises and Providence

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# Where Genesis Meets Life

Promises and  
Providence

**Harding University's 68th Annual  
Bible Lectureship**

HARDING UNIVERSITY  
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Searcy, Arkansas 72143

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## FOREWORD

The Apostle Paul said, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). He is obviously referring to the Scriptures that we call the Old Testament.

When we neglect to study all of God's revelation, including the Old Testament, we are the poorer for it. The committee chose the study of Genesis for the 68th Annual Lectureship because of its importance to the understanding of God's relationship to the world and his communion with mankind.

This book, *Where Genesis Meets Life: Promises and Providence*, focuses on the important themes of Genesis and draws applications for Christians today. The forty-nine speakers and writers have carefully explored the various topics which have significance for the church today.

I express my appreciation for each author who has contributed to this book. Their greatest compensation will be the careful study that you give to what they have written.

I also express my appreciation to my efficient secretary, Cindy Drumheller, and to David Crouch and his staff in the Public Relations Office. They always do their work cheerfully and with care.

It is my prayer that this lectureship will give all of us a deepened understanding of God—the Creator and Sustainer of life.

Don Shackelford  
Lectureship Director





## DEDICATION

Jim Bill McInteer has been closely associated with the Harding Bible Lectureship since he first became a student more than fifty years ago. Through the years, he has conducted numerous classes and has addressed audiences in Theme and Forum lectures as well.

He is a 1942 graduate of Harding and was elected to the Board of Trustees in 1950. Since 1980, he has served as secretary for the group. In 1964 he was named the Distinguished Alumnus.

In July of 1943, he married the former Betty Bergner, also a graduate of Harding. Their two children, MariLynn McInteer Canterbury and Mark McInteer, are graduates of 1972 and 1975, respectively.

The Kentucky native began preaching in Tennessee at the age of eighteen. He served churches full time in Sheridan, Arkansas; Isabel, Kansas; Locust Grove, Kentucky; and Grace Avenue in Nashville, Tennessee, before beginning a thirty-year work with the West End church of Christ in Nashville.

McInteer presided at both the inauguration and the retirement of Clifton L. Ganus, Jr., as President of Harding University. He also presided at the inauguration of David B. Burks in 1987. Frequently, he has served as Master of Ceremonies at Homecoming Black and Gold banquets, and he addresses the student body periodically in chapel. The author of the *Tiny Tots' Bible Reader*, he is also publisher of *21st Century Christian* magazine.

He has preached in churches both large and small throughout the world, and his gift of speech, coupled with his dedication to Christ, have sustained many souls in their walk toward and with God.

Because of his unsurpassed dedication to his Lord, his family, and Harding University, we lovingly dedicate the 1991 *Where Genesis Meets Life: Promises and Providence* lecture-ship book to JIM BILL McINTEER.



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# GENESIS: AN INTRODUCTION

Don Shackelford

On February 5, 1971, Apollo 14 commander Edgar Mitchell deposited on the moon a packet of microfilm containing a complete Bible and one verse of the Bible written out in sixteen languages.<sup>1</sup> That verse is: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." These important words set the theme for the sixty-six inspired books. They are uniquely books about *God*! They narrate *his* word, *his* creative works, *his* involvement in the history of the mankind.

The importance of an understanding of Genesis as *real history of real people* cannot be overemphasized. Koop and Schaeffer have well said:

All the information given by the Bible flows out of the information given in the early chapters of Genesis. If we are to understand the world as it is and ourselves as we are, we must know the flow of history given in these chapters. Take this away and the flow of history is lost. Take this away and even the death of Christ has no meaning.<sup>2</sup>

The lectureship theme states well the importance of the first book of the Bible: *Where Genesis Meets Life: Promises and Providence*. The lectures included in this book are based upon the premise that Genesis is an inerrant revelation and an inerrant account of real history of real people and real events.

## TITLE

The Hebrew custom was to name a book after its beginning



word or words. Thus, this first book of the Hebrew Bible is entitled "*bereshith*." This is translated "in the beginning." Our English title, Genesis, comes from the Greek Septuagint of chapter 2 verse 4. The Greeks named books after their contents or authors.

## OUTLINE

Some scholars divide Genesis into two parts: Genesis 1-11 and 12-50. Claus Westermann titles Genesis 1-11: "The Primal History" and 12-50: "The Patriarchal History."<sup>3</sup>

"The Primal History" includes the creation of the world, the creation of mankind, the entrance of sin into the world, the descendants of Adam and Eve, the genealogical list, the account of Noah and the flood, the table of nations, and the genealogy of Shem.

"The Patriarchal History" carries forward the story from God's call of Abram in Ur to the death of Joseph in Egypt. It is the story of "Promises and Providence" as God works out his purposes in history in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his sons. We see the sharp issue of belief and unbelief in the daily situations of life of real men and women.

Other scholars have suggested a tenfold (or elevenfold) division of the text of Genesis based upon the recurring words "These are the generations of. . . ." (*toledoth* in Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). R. K. Harrison, a conservative evangelical scholar, suggests that it may be possible to "identify eleven literary units or tablets characterized by this form."<sup>4</sup> It is his opinion that Moses used these "sources" in his compilation of the book, "adding the material relating to Joseph and transcribing the entire corpus on a leather or papyrus roll."<sup>5</sup>

Regardless as to whether or not we accept Harrison's proposal for these "sources" of Genesis, it is evident that Moses did use "these are the generations of" (*toledoth*) as an indicator of progression in the narration of events in Genesis. It may be that at each juncture of this phrase, a theme is dismissed while another is carried forward.

The following outline is adapted from Irving L. Jensen:<sup>6</sup>

- A. The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth (1:1—2:3)
- B. The Generations of the Heavens and the Earth (2:4-25)
- C. The Fall of Man (3:1—4:26)
- D. The Descendants of Adam (5:1-32)
- E. The Flood (6:1—9:29)
- F. The Birth of Nations (10:1—11:32)
- G. Abraham, the Father of Israel (12:1—25:18)
- H. Isaac, the Child of Promise (25:19—26:35)
- I. Jacob, the Transformed Brother (27:1—37:2a)
- J. Joseph, the Beloved Son of Jacob (37:2b—50:26)

## AUTHOR

It would be far beyond the scope of this brief introduction for me to discuss the complexity of questions involved in the authorship of Genesis. Since the rise of "higher criticism" in the eighteenth century, most liberal scholars have denied the Mosaic authorship of Genesis and most of the Pentateuch.<sup>7</sup> Their presuppositions have been ably challenged and refuted.<sup>8</sup> But the battle rages on with an eminent Yale University literary critic proposing in a book published in 1990 the absurd notion that the Pentateuch was written by Ms. Moses!<sup>9</sup>

It is my opinion, based upon the rest of the Old Testament and the testimony of Jesus and the apostles, that we can affirm the Mosaic authorship of Genesis.<sup>10</sup>

## THEMES

Genesis introduces several important themes which reoccur throughout the Bible. Many of these are lecture topics discussed in the pages which follow.

### *Beginnings*

The first theme is *beginnings*. In Genesis we have inspired information concerning the creation of the universe, earth, plants, animals, and mankind. God's evaluation of his creation is that it was *good*. Schaeffer has noted:



Genesis 1 tells us over and over again an important thing about this creation: In verse 4 we read, "And God saw the light, that it was good." The phrase *that it was good* is repeated in verses 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25. And verse 31 sums up the whole of God's judgment: "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." This is not a relative judgment, but a judgment of the holy God who has a character and whose character is the law of the universe. His conclusion: Every step and every sphere of creation, and the whole thing put together—man himself and his total environment, the heavens and the earth—conforms to myself.<sup>11</sup>

### Sin

Next we are told of the entrance of sin into the world through man's disobedience. The terrible consequence of sin is death. Sin is seen in its awfulness as it grows until "the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Clyde Woods gives us an excellent analysis of sin in his lecture: "Sin in Genesis."

### Covenant

A third prominent theme of Genesis is covenant (*berith*). G. E. Mendenhall defines "covenant" as "a solemn promise made binding by an oath, which may be either a verbal formula or a symbolic action."<sup>12</sup> In the Old Testament the covenant rests on the promises of God. William Dyrness correctly notes that "it is the core of the Hebrew understanding of their relationship with God."<sup>13</sup>

Although the idea of covenant is present in the promise made to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15) and is reflected in God's merciful marking of Cain (Gen. 4:14), the term is first used in God's promise to faithful Noah that he and his family will be saved in the ark (Gen. 6:18). It is God who takes the initiative in covenants with Noah, Abraham, and his seed, the nation of Israel.<sup>14</sup>

### Worship

Although our English word "worship" occurs only four

times in Genesis (NASV: 22:5; 24:26, 48; 47:31), the concept of worship is present throughout the book. Worship is the response of God's people to his acts and being as creator, rescuer, and redeemer.

"Worship" is from an Old English word which means "worthship" or worthiness. R. P. Martin observes that it "connotes actions motivated by an attitude that reveres, honors, or describes the worth of another person."<sup>15</sup> Dyrness adds that "the followers of God know that real freedom comes not when we do as we please, but when we walk in the paths that God has set for us."<sup>16</sup>

Biblical worship is always centered in God. It is the response of a grateful attitude of heart demonstrated by the offering of praise, prayer, and giving. Cain and Abel expressed their thanksgiving for bountiful harvests and increases in the flocks (Gen. 4:3, 4). Noah offered sacrifices for safety from the flood (Gen. 8:20-22). Abraham's trusted servant worshiped the Lord because of his loving-kindness (Gen. 24:26, 48). We are told of altars being built to worship the Lord thirteen times in Genesis. The patriarchs built them to gratefully respond to God's provision, providence, and promises (Gen. 8:20; 12:7, 8; 13:4, 8; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 3; 35:7).

### Family

A colleague in the College of Bible and Religion recently remarked to me that he has been impressed with the emphasis on family in Genesis and, for that matter, in the entire Old Testament. It is evident that the family is a divine institution (Gen. 2:18-24; 9:1). The integrity of the home is to be maintained. When the Pharisees asked Jesus about the legitimacy of divorce, he responded by quoting Gen. 1:27 and 2:24 and concluding: "Consequently they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Mt. 19:6). The blessing of having children is apparent throughout the patriarchal history. Joel Johnson and Allan Isom have contributed valuable studies on the topic of the family.



## CONCLUSION

The themes discussed above are only a sampling of the important lessons to be learned from the book of Genesis. I do not think it is an overstatement to say that one's attitude toward Genesis and its contents will determine his attitude toward the entire Bible.

If it is dismissed as myth or less than true history, then one has no basis for accepting the truthfulness of the rest of the Bible. A bankrupt theology of denial of the events recorded in Genesis has no foundation for affirming anything positive about the Christ.

We should all approach this first book of the Bible with reverence and awe. The great and gracious Creator of the universe has revealed himself to man. He has desired to have intimate communion with those created in his own image. What a marvelous thought!

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), 22.

<sup>2</sup>C. Everett Koop and Francis A. Schaeffer, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, rev. ed. (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1983), 113.

<sup>3</sup>Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), v.

<sup>4</sup>R. K. Harrison, "Genesis," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 2:436.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:437.

<sup>6</sup>Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 70-77. I would recommend this book for anyone who is beginning study of the Old Testament. It has many helpful features.

<sup>7</sup>See the discussions in S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (1897; reprint, New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 5-21; and Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible—A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 92-121.

<sup>8</sup>See Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1949); Robert Dick Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959); and U. Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1941).

<sup>9</sup>"Ms. Moses," *Time*, 1 October 1990, 80.

<sup>10</sup>See my lecture on this subject: "Biblical Authorship: The Five Books of Moses," *Giving a Reason for Our Hope, Freed-Hardeman College 1990 Lectures* (Nashville, Tenn.: Williams Printing Co., 1990), 221-25.

<sup>11</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 55.

<sup>12</sup>G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible A-D*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1962), 714.

<sup>13</sup>William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 113.

<sup>14</sup>See the excellent discussion of "covenant" in Furman Kearley's lecture "The Concept of Covenant in Genesis."

<sup>15</sup>R. P. Martin, "Worship," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 4:1117.

<sup>16</sup>Dyrness, 144.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON GENESIS

Commentaries and Bible helps should be read *only after one has carefully read the text of the biblical book several times*. One should first master the text of the Bible before going to the comments of others.

The bibliography provided here and those in the other lectures of this book are intended to help us better understand the divine message. You will not agree with all of the conclusions of all of the authors. Nevertheless, it is helpful to read what others have written. The books marked with an asterisk [\*] are by members of the church of Christ. Those marked with a pound sign [#] are written from a "higher critical" point of view and should be read with caution.

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## WHEN JACOB SAW RACHEL!

Jim Bill McInteer

When Jacob saw Rachel the arrows of Cupid, according to the most confirmed romanticist, found their mark. All those tender things—"love at first sight," "marriages made in heaven"—unfold. It is a very personal story to me. During the earliest moments of my being on the Harding campus, standing on Godden Hall steps beneath the ancient canopy that joined Godden and Pattie Cobb Hall, I saw a lovely young lady walk by. White boots, tassels swinging from them, bouncy in the step of a beautiful girl, that vision definitely caught my eye.

I asked, "Who is that girl?" The answer came, "Betty Bergner, but I think she's engaged." I immediately felt the challenge. "She was!" Thus on my part began a desired courtship that has resulted in almost fifty years of marriage.

Personally, I know how Jacob felt (though I am not yet his seventy-seven years of age at this encounter) when he saw Rachel "beautiful in face and form" (Gen. 29:17). May I tell you this ancient love story.

Chapter 29 of Genesis starts on an upbeat note. Prosaically the KJV states, "Jacob went on his journey," and literally means, "he lifted up his feet." Today we would say he "kicked up his heels." Strahan writes "animated by hope," Jacob leaves the rich experience of the ladder of heaven at Bethel to continue the next 450 miles of his 600-mile odyssey. Emerson stated, "We become physically nimble and lightsome; we tread on air, life is no longer irksome and we think it will never be so." Isaiah exceeded them all when by inspiration he penned: "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and



not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Is. 40:31).

Jacob knew where he was going. A journey needs a destination; else it is aimless wandering.

Finally he came to Haran, chief town of Padan-aram, Northern Mesopotamia. It was a town he had targeted—so it is always good to mature honorable plans.

A strategic well was outside the city. Wells, as the Bible often shows, were important places of meeting. Three flocks of sheep were already there at high noon. It seemed to be the custom for all the flocks to come, for the stone that covered the mouth of the well to be rolled away, and in the order of the gathering for the sheep to be watered. The partial assembly was taking place as Jacob arrived on the scene.

The stranger initiated the greetings by asking, "Where are you from?" Hearing Haran, naturally he asked, "Do you know Laban?" Laban was called "son of Nahor" as "son" in the Scriptures often covers more than succeeding generations. Bethuel was Laban's dad in reality.

Jacob hit pay dirt! He is where he desired to be, and now he finds kinfolk! After all, did not God make him a benevolent promise? (Gen. 28:13-15). Have you ever heard of one of God's promises failing? He can and will consistently do what he says he will do. You can depend on it!

Immediately these shepherds, whether men or boys little matters (many prefer to think of them as boys to fit a romantic story—the suitor always needs to get rid of little brother so he can adequately court big sister), pointed Jacob's attention to Rachel. His eyes never left that target.

With dispatch, Jacob swung into action. The stranger told the shepherds how to do their work! It is high noon. He thought, "Water the sheep, use the daylight to get them back to the pasture—and, consequently, leave me alone with this beautiful woman."

As often with worthy plans, there is the tangible objective. All the flocks have to be brought in. The implication is that the big stone requires assistance to move.

Jacob is not easily defeated. He had a double vision: Rachel and the sheep. Some wag has said, "Don't marry for money,

but it's all right to love someone who's got it." Jacob perhaps knew it not at the time, but he is just now enrolling in a twenty-year course at the university of hard knocks. It will be seven years before Rachel becomes his bride—lay no charge of a hasty marriage at their feet—and thirteen more years before vast flocks and herds are his.

Whether Jacob had assistance from more than his own adrenalin or the added aid of attending shepherds is unknown, but the rock was moved, and quickly Rachel amazingly watched her flock watered.

From now on Jacob's eyes are on Rachel. Hebron is behind him. Esau is not a concern, for Rachel absorbs him. It is the first love story of the Bible. First sight? Who can gainsay it? He is destined to work seven years at menial tasks for Rachel's hand: "And they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had for her" (Gen. 29:20). When this Hebrew man saw the Syrian maid, the sparks flew. As one well said, love comes while we are busy with the common tasks of life. Candlish calls it a love that is "quick, strong, and lasting." Even on his deathbed, Jacob remembered his wife who many years earlier died in childbirth (Gen. 48:7). It truly is one of the sweet love stories of all time.

"Jacob kissed Rachel" (Gen. 29:11), and like good girls do, she "ran [home] and told her father" (Gen. 29:12). And by this time folks are "running" everywhere. Rachel ran to tell her dad, Laban "ran" to meet Jacob, and they are kissing each other all over the place (Gen. 29:13).

It further needs to be pointed out that Jacob "lifted up his voice and wept"—not because he had to kiss his prospective father-in-law, not because Rachel was ugly, not because he had missed a unique opportunity, but rather because God was so good in keeping his word. These were tears of joy. Coleridge expressed the opinion that "no man could be a bad man who loved as Jacob loved Rachel." He also deeply loved his God! He had reason to. Hear these words from Deut. 32:9-13:

For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed



him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.

Many side issues are connected with this love story. Water was essential in the meeting of this famous couple. (I am tempted now to stop and preach on the necessity of water baptism but will forego this urge.) Good marriages last and are not hastily entered into. Good marriages produce—this one did. Good marriages feel the providence of God in the arranging of it. Good marriages see both a man and a woman who are not afraid of work. And good marriages never let love die. May yours be abundantly blessed.

And so starts a love that never ended: "When Jacob saw Rachel" (Gen. 29:10), a love affair began that lasts in our hearts until this moment. We praise the Holy Spirit for giving us a story that continues to provide the goose pimples of the "way of a man with a maid."

JIM BILL MCINTEER of Nashville, Tennessee, was the preacher for West End church of Christ in Nashville for thirty years before his retirement. He is now president and publisher of the *21st Century Christian* magazine, *Power for Today*, as well as the *20th Century Graded Bible Lessons*. He serves on the board of trustees of Harding University and is the chairman of the Harding Graduate School Committee.

## CRIPPLED, BUT CROWNED

(Genesis 32:22-32)

Jim Bill McInteer

Sandwiched between the reconciliation of two estranged brothers is the strangest wrestling match ever known to man. Folk still argue about the unusual protagonist. Bruce said the story is so skillfully told that one cannot recognize the opponent any more quickly than Jacob did.

As to the difficulty of interpretation, Martin Luther called it the most obscure text of the Bible. Albert Barnes said no expositor could clear up every detail. So a logical question arises: What am I doing with it?

Hopefully you will see the following: (1) We can go back to the mountains of Galeed. (2) We will observe a ninety-seven-year-old man in the loneliness of a black night. (3) We will tense with him over the forthcoming meeting between Jacob and Esau. What will it produce? If Esau wins, the Savior's lineage line is broken—and so are we. (4) We will visit River Jabbok, called Blue River today, and see how a crippling can result in a crowning.

Shall we move on with the story?

Jacob has made his final preparation for the Esau confrontation. He has prayed, though admittedly not often. (Jacob has several children today who say, "I'm in a bind . . . better pray." What about it when you are blessed?) Prayer had not been too necessary for Jacob. His cunning had been his weapon, not his prayers.

He did take inventory. He went out with just his staff in his hand. Now he is wealthy and has two bands of people. He went out alone, even though he is a multitude. He is at Jabbok. Interestingly, the root word is of the wrestling derivation.



Suddenly a hand seizes Jacob. Unexpectedly. Unannounced. Unknown. It is night; it surely must have been frightening.

Is it just another obstacle in the path of the return to home? Should he fight it out and give up the idea of the return to Hebron? Is he the only man, the last man to face obstacles and discouragement? We are not told when the wrestling match started. Was the struggle all night or part of it? It is known that Jacob did not start it; a "man" from somewhere else, even beyond earth, did. The "man" wrestles with Jacob, not Jacob with the man. Peter, at Pentecost, stood up with the eleven. The eleven were not standing up with him. There is a difference! When a man wrestles with you, initiating the attack, it is obvious he wants what you have got! This is a very important fact in our story.

The question naturally arises, Who is the man? Multiple have been the guesses.

"It's an angel," says one, created (since angels were made) for this one encounter.

"It's Michael. He often had to do the heavy work," voices another.

"It's a local deity"; "It's Esau"; "It's a demon"; "It's a vision"; "It's his conscience as he wrestles with himself," chime in still more.

Let me disagree. Jacob said it was the God of righteousness, and he is the fellow doing the wrestling. We take his word. Jacob's first enemy is God—not Esau or Laban. Jacob needs to be conquered and bow to the supremacy of the Lord.

Evidently it was a lengthy match, continuing till the break of day. It was not one of our six-minute mat affairs. The outcome puzzles men—the "man" prevailed not!

Does this weaken the fact of the omnipotency of God? God wrestled with Moses emotionally. Condescending to human understanding and enlightenment of his personality, God told Moses, "Let me alone" (Ex. 32:10). God allows man to see how attentive heaven is to man's needs. He needs to conquer in this match Jacob's self-sufficient spirit. He will even change his name, underscoring the change of character.

The "man" touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and sud-

denly it is out of joint. Man, ordinary of nature, does not "touch" another and disjoin him. This is heaven's power. Jacob was touched, not struck. Dreams do not dislocate hips. Grace must win the victory, not man's prowess. After all, we all "get out of joint" sometimes, all the better to correct a bad situation.

As day breaks, the "man" says, "Let me go." Power is available through prayer, friend. God allows man to be mighty with him. God can and must say "No" to some of our prayers. He is sovereign. Sometimes he chooses not to prevail. Wonder why daybreak was the time for his exit? Obviously, Jacob has work to do. Esau must be met. One cannot stay on his knees all day—there is a time to pray and there is a time to practice that faith.

Some believe that seeing God face to face would cause Jacob to die, but duty pressures man. In the "ascending of the morn," man of earth needs to be about the "man" of heaven's business.

Jacob realizes now what he has and will not let go unless he is blessed. One said a lame man learns to cling lest he fall. Manifesting a yearning and hunger for God puts us in position to win life's struggles. Jacob must see, however, he deserves nothing; he must be disciplined and chastened. His begging the blessing is admission of his inferiority.

The name exchange occurs as the "man" asks, "What is your name?" Names are important. They index character and personality. They are the summation of what one is.

But did the heavenly visitor not know Jacob's name? Surely just for exercise God is not dropping in at Jabbok just to wrestle with whatever came along that night. It was not for information but to emphasize a change that is coming that caused the question to be proposed.

The answer, of course, was "Jacob." He is the heel-snatcher. He is the trickster. He is the cunning self-sufficient person. Jacob will be assaulted in his strong point. He will see his unworthiness finally.

"No more Jacob—but Israel!" What a change! A break comes with the past. A new name brings a new spirit, a new destiny.



Multiple are the suggested definitions of the name Israel. It is interesting research to see the possibilities: "God rules"; "Per-severer with God"; "Prince of God"; "man seeing God"; "he who rules as God"; "fighter with God"; "God strives." Take your pick.

What is significant is that no longer is Jacob to prevail by cunning but he prevails with God by submission. God's purpose in overpowering Jacob's self-sufficient lifestyle is being completed. The supplanter is supplanted, wrote one. The supplanter is now the supplicant. You have come a long way *down*, Jacob. If Jacob is powerful with God, surely he will rightfully be with man.

Jacob wanted a return favor as he asked his opponent his name. He got no answer. Man must learn to be satisfied with what God has said. He is not invited to ask for more. Heaven is not beholden to man. Man does not grasp fully every blessing of the Lord, nor does he understand all his workings. The important thing to consider is what does God think of us?

Jacob was blessed. He now sees his own weaknesses. He must not rely on his strength alone. "The arm of flesh" will fail is often sung. Jacob, victory is not found in snatching but in submitting. No wonder, as Hosea wrote, "Jacob wept."

Israel now gives the spot a name. Peniel, meaning the face of God, is so appropriate. He has been in the presence of the Lord. The name reflects honor to God, no personal victory to Jacob. Surely the "man" was God.

Ah, yes, the sun rose, and there now is sunshine without, and also within. A new day dawns for Jacob. It always does when man is in harmony with God. Hear Mal. 4:2: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." From the blackness of night, he rises to new power and personality.

Yes, he halted on his thigh. He is obviously limited but, as Meyer wrote, "It is well to be maimed if we learn to lay hold on greater strength." You are a better person when you bear the marks of Jesus upon you (Gal. 6:17).

True faith must persevere. A lame Israel is better than a

whole Jacob. Man today may limp from his losses, the anomalies and the blows of adversaries, but what matters is if he is in the Lord. The crippling of Jacob resulted in the crowning of Israel. No wonder saints today sing the following:

Other refuge have I none;  
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee.  
Leave, oh leave me not alone,  
Still support and comfort me.  
All my trust on Thee is stayed.  
All my help from Thee I bring.  
Cover my defenseless head  
with the shadow of thy wing.

God grant it—if crippled, let us be crowned.



## WHEN JACOB SAW THE WAGONS

(Genesis 45:16-28)

Jim Bill McInteer

Indeed, it was a tearful reunion. No longer could Joseph emotionally and purposefully withhold his identity from his non-suspecting brothers. No way could this right-hand man of Pharaoh be their deposed brother. But Joseph knew differently. From the first he knew who they were. Cat and mouse, the game is over. Forgiveness is in order—and so are tears. Aurthur Gordon is quoted by Kolp in *How Can I Help?*<sup>1</sup> as saying salt water will cure anything—be it in the form of sweat, tears, or the ocean. It is emotion time in Egypt—"I am Joseph!"

Composure was hard to come by—shock and incredulity made it harder, but finally "his brethren talked with him."

A double invitation was extended—first, lovingly by Joseph and, second, supportingly official by Pharaoh. "Come on down"—in Egypt food was plentiful, and they were welcome.

Good news, great news, saving news is often greeted by tears. They reverberated all the way to Pharaoh's house. The "fame" or voice, rumor of what had happened reached royal ears and his court.

Guess what? They were happy about it. It is beautiful for you to have good fortune; it is an added bigness for your friends to rejoice in it also.

Pharaoh did not assume Jacob's household knew they had an invitation—he personally extended it. (Just a little aside, preaching brother—do not assume everybody is saved or if they are not they know what to do. Let us hear the inviting story of Jesus' redeeming love and the necessity of faith confessed in him, repentance and immersion into his death—tell it

constantly.)

Pharaoh is grateful for what Joseph has done for his country, and gratitude prompts him to respond. One has rightfully said, God is good to us not because of us but because of our elder brother.

Pharaoh's invitation had teeth in it. Multiple presents were sent to Jacob to assure its genuineness. I loved a child's letter to his grandmother: "I'm sorry I forgot your birthday last week. It will serve me right if you forget mine next Tuesday." We need these "gentle" reminders. Not only presents to present but the promise of the best of the land. Goshen must have been about thirty miles by thirty miles in size. "Jacob, you will not be confined. The wealth of Egypt, the fat of the land, the fertility of our area—yours by my command, Jacob; signed: Pharaoh." Sounds "heavenly," doesn't it? Jacob is not the last one to be blessed by a king.

So let us start the process: Load the wagons!

It is the first biblical mention of "wagons," perhaps two-wheel vehicles aptly suited for roadless desert conveyance. Usually drawn by cattle, well did they serve the intended purpose.

It was an interesting command: "Regard not your stuff." Did you ever try to clean out the attic? Why is all that stuff up there anyhow? And why do you depart empty-handed? "Just can't bear to throw it away"; "Might need it"; "Sweet memories"; "Want to give my children a chore when I'm gone." No, Jacob, do not burden yourself with "stuff." Make a clean break and trip.

Joseph, too, sent presents—changes of clothing for, after all, "You will come back to stand in the presence of the king." (Me thinks my King must be shocked when one who can do better stands at the Lord's table in a "Hard Rock" tee shirt.) Dress to meet the King!

But Benjamin is especially blessed—three hundred pieces of silver, five changes of raiments. We all have favorites. And for Jacob there were ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt and ten more carrying things for the return trip. Of course, at this time in the story, Jacob is totally oblivious of



these details.

Wisely came a word of warning, "See that ye fall not out by the way." Literally, "Be not stirred." Why were they warned? "You might have a jealous argument"; "You might think it is all a trick"; "You might point accusing fingers." Disputes hinder brotherhood. Quarrels detract. Cool it.

Home go the troops—carrying with them the bounty of Egypt, the forgiveness of Joseph, and the blessings of providence. After all, it was "not you that sent me, but God."

As quickly as they could on arrival, they told the good news. It was too much. Jacob believed not. He had mourned this son who wore the coat of many colors twenty years. "He's dead, don't you know that?" "No, Father, Joseph's alive!" Jacob's heart fainted. Literally, it grew chilled, stopped in utter amazement.

But that is not the end of the story. Supportive evidence of this gospel is there. Jacob "saw the wagons." Barnhouse calls this the "down payment." It is the "earnest money" of good things to come. So Jacob's spirit revived, or as the Septuagint has it, "stirred up" the almost extinguished embers.

Jacob lived; he believed; he accepted the bounty. He remembers who he is: "And Israel [not Jacob the heel-snatcher, but Israel, the overcoming prince of God] said, It is enough—Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die."

Sufficiency! God is ever adequate. In fact, it is always good measure—no niggardliness with God—no scrimping-windows of heaven opened and gifts poured out. God does it. His love is at work—"It's enough!"

So the old patriarch left with confidence. Tennyson taught us, "Death closes all: but something ere the end, Some work of noble note, may yet be done. . . . 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world." Ah, yes, Ulysses, our friend Jacob "saw the wagons"—he is salvation bound.

With all the evidence granted us, are we? Let us "see the wagons."

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>June Cerza Kolp, *How Can I Help? Reaching Out to Someone* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989), 131.

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## THEME LECTURES

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## IN THE BEGINNING: A STUDY OF "FIRST PRINCIPLES" (Genesis 1)

Michael C. Armour

This sermon will be a "first principles" sermon with a twist, for I want to talk about the very first principles which God laid in place. We find them in the opening chapter of Genesis, beginning with that well-known phrase, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Had we lived in Moses' day, those words would have riveted our attention, pulling us up short. For they constitute a wholesale attack on perceptions of deity at the core of most ancient religions. To the pagan mind the material universe was eternal, the source from which both gods and men had sprung. Gods were not independent of the cosmos, but rather constituents within it.

Such viewpoints compelled those cultures to see gods as subservient to time, just like men. If the cosmos existed before the gods, then time also pre-existed the gods. Over against that world view, Moses declares that God is independent of both the material universe and that entity called "time" which governs it. Time is his tool, the cosmos his handiwork. The entire visible realm is contingent on him.

Moses follows that declaration—and underscores it—by describing two three-day groupings of creative activity. In days one to three, God concerns himself with fashioning various habitations. On days four to six, he creates specific bodies associated with those habitations. Moreover, what he creates on each day of the second triad corresponds directly to what he had created on the equivalent day of the first triad.

For us these parallels may seem mere literary curiosities, holding nothing more than academic interest. But in the milieu



of ancient paganism, this was a profound affirmation. Other religions believed the gods had fashioned the animate world from materials found at hand, materials which pre-existed the gods themselves. Not so with Jehovah. No raw materials stood ready when he began to create. But by the power of the spoken word, everything which our senses perceive sprang into being.

This fundamental difference between the God of Israel and the gods of the nations made natural theology possible. Greeks never believed they could discover truth about Zeus by studying nature. But David could profess that "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). And Paul would insist that the invisible attributes of God can be ascertained from the creation (Rom. 1:20). Indeed, Judaism and Christianity are unique in their claim that men encounter the mind of God in the mysteries of nature.

Having thus set aside a mythological view of the universe, Genesis next turns to an exalted view of humanity. Moses makes three major declarations about the nature of man. First, God created him a spiritual being; second, he created him a sovereign being; and third, he created him a sexual being.

Unlike other land-dwellers, Moses notes, the human race bears the impress of God's own image. But what does it mean to possess the image of God? The simplest explanation is that of all the creatures, man alone has a spirit. Man's body gives him a common essence with the rest of the material creation. His soul gives him a common essence with the animate world. (See the Hebrew wording of Gen. 1:30 and 7:15.) His spirit gives him a common essence with God, the ultimate Spirit.

Through his spirit, man interacts with God as no other member of nature can. To borrow an analogy from computing, the spirit is the interface through which the Creator communicates with the inner being of his creature. Just as interference on a computer circuit destroys data transmissions, corruption of man's spirit disrupts communication between him and God. That is why renewal of the human spirit and the indwelling of God's Spirit are such central doctrines in the New Testament. God originally created us to commune with his Spirit through our spirit. The fall of man in Genesis 3 changed all that. When

we become a "new creation" in Christ, God restores that communication once more.

However, Moses does more than simply affirm that man is created in the image of God. He goes on to say that God made man a partner in his sovereignty. Moses expounds this in two ways. First is God's straightforward pronouncement: "Let man rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth." Then, in an act of profound significance to ancient minds, God has man name the creatures around him.

For Old Testament people, the right to name something connoted authority over it. Thus, God would rename Abram, Sarai, and Jacob. And the Babylonian king would rename Daniel and his companions. Returning to the creation account, God names the light and the darkness, heaven and earth. But he leaves to man the naming of the animals. In the creation story God names the things over which he retains all sovereignty himself. To man he delegates the right to name those things in which God enters a shared sovereignty with humanity.

But Moses closely connects the issue of sovereignty with the concept of stewardship. Man receives sovereignty over the natural order for a purpose, specifically, to preserve it and render it useful. In Genesis 2 he is to "dress the garden," not exploit it or destroy it. God has granted him authority over the earth to permit him the wherewithal to sustain and protect what God has entrusted to his care.

Is there then an ecological mandate for Christians? Decidedly so. Had they understood their calling fully, God's people should have been the first environmentalists. We show our respect to the Creator by means of the regard we show his creation.

Moreover, if God indeed reveals himself in nature, we give that revelation full force only to the degree that nature maintains her purity. Who is struck by the majesty of God while perusing a smog-shrouded valley? Who marvels at God's creative power while walking a filth-laden beach? Just as we are to live so that the world beholds Christ in our lives, we must also tend God's creation so that he continues to be seen through his



handiwork.

Having instilled in man a spiritual and sovereign nature like his own, God also gave mankind a sexual nature in common with the animal kingdom: "Male and female created He them." And he commanded them to be procreative with such fruitfulness that they filled the earth with their offspring.

This emphasis on human sexuality in Genesis 1 is striking. To some it might even seem out of place. Why speak of a thing so carnal as sexuality here, in a passage which celebrates man's dignity as the image-bearing likeness of God? But Moses makes no apology for placing sexuality and spirituality side by side. He thus sets the stage for a unique aspect of biblical religion, namely, an insistence that spirituality transcends ordinary religious ritual to encompass even the most ordinary aspects of daily life.

In this regard, Judaism and Christianity stood as bold contrasts to other ancient faiths. Even advanced civilizations such as those of Greece and Rome completely divorced religion from ethics. Piety was reflected in what one did at the temple. But when it came to daily living, values were drawn from a school of philosophy, not from a body of religious tenets.

Jews and Christians, however, were steadfast in their insistence that what one believed about God had unavoidable implications for how one should live. Moses begins building that theme by having one creative moment embrace man both as a spiritual being and as a sexual one.

Here, then, are the "first principles" of Genesis 1. First, God is independent of both time and space. That is why it is so sinful for man to "worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). To the degree that we fix our gaze on the creature, we fail to lift our vision to the true splendor of the Creator. Second, neither time nor matter is eternal. Ultimately, we must concede either the eternal nature of Spirit or the eternal nature of Matter. Paganism, for the most part, opted for the latter, as does modern naturalism. Genesis 1 clearly sounds a contrary note.

Third, man stands unique within that created order, alone bearing the imprint of the eternal Spirit. He was created for the

communion of his spirit and the Creator's Spirit. Not only that, the spiritual nature he shares with God gives him the opportunity to serve as a partner in God's endeavors.

And fourth, man was created to live in human partnerships, as well. God made man male and female and urged them to fulfill their mandate on the earth in an intimate relationship.

These "first principles" in Genesis 1 need just as much emphasis in our teaching as those truths we more commonly associate with that phrase. The pagan temptation to give excessive priority to the material realm still crouches at our door. Ironically, even Christians are prone to use the phrase "body, soul, and spirit" in opposition to the biblical sequence in 1 Thess. 5:12, where Paul speaks of "spirit, soul, and body." Have we subconsciously reversed the order because we do not fully sense that the ultimate reality is spirit, not body? Do we give more time to the well-being of the body than the well-being of the spirit? Do we sing of heaven and eternity, but live as though space and time encompass the entire realm of reality? To the degree we answer "yes" to questions such as these, we need regular reminders of the first principles in Genesis 1.

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## DESIGNER GENES: FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

(Genesis 2)

Mike Cope

Up from the bed of the river  
God scooped the clay;  
And by the bank of the river  
He kneeled him down;  
And there the great God almighty  
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,  
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,  
Who rounded the earth in the middle of the hand;  
This Great God,  
Like a mammy bending over her baby,  
Kneeled down in the dust  
Toiling over a lump of clay  
Till he shaped it in his own image;  
Then into it he blew the breath of life,  
And man became a living soul.  
Amen. Amen.

(From James Weldon Johnson,  
"The Creation," in *God's Trombones*)

Genesis 1:1—2:3 is a panoramic view of creation. It uses a wide-angle lens to describe the creating work of God. In Gen. 2:4, the wide-angle lens is tucked away and a telephoto lens is pulled out. The text now zooms in on the zenith of God's creation: humanity.

Chapter 1 is poetry; chapter 2 is prose. The first account is lofty and dignified; the second is simple and down-to-earth. The first points at the entire forest; the second stares at a few trees. In chapter 1 God is the transcendent and all-powerful

creator; in chapter 2 "the Lord God" is intimately involved in the lives of the people he formed.

These early chapters of Genesis are essential to capturing the world view of the Judeo-Christian faith. The writer is aware of competing paradigms in his world, most of which present a cosmology that is polytheistic, chaotic, and in the ultimate hands of fate. Here we meet the unequivocal truths of revealed faith—especially the truth that the world is under the sovereignty of the Lord God.

As the telephoto lens begins to zoom in on the subject of chapter 2, we can see the focus on humanity. The question the author wants us to raise as we read is, "What place do men and women hold in this world?" The insights the story reveals could not be more relevant to our modern setting!

### HUMANITY'S PLACE IN CREATION

First, the text describes humanity's place in creation. In the first chapter, God's creating act is always by divine fiat: he calls things into existence. But the second account tells us that the creation of people was different. "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being."

The verbs chosen indicate God's special care. He "formed" Adam like a potter working with clay (Gen. 1:7). He "built" Eve from the rib he had taken out of Adam (Gen. 1:22).

Because of his great love, God prepared a garden where they could live—a garden filled with "trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food" and watered by a river. To the man, God entrusted the care of Eden. Adam was to work and take care of it.

This creation story stood in stark contrast to other ancient accounts. For example, in one Babylonian creation account, humans are almost an afterthought of the capricious gods. Blind forces and rhythmic cycles of nature had dominion over people.

The claim of Genesis is that people are Godlike creatures, uniquely gifted with dignity and worth. God even entrusted the



care of what he made into human hands.

The author would undoubtedly "amen" the psalmist who penned:

When I consider your heavens,  
 the work of your fingers,  
 the moon and the stars,  
 which you have set in place,  
 what is man that you are mindful of him,  
 the son of man that you care for him?  
 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
 and crowned him with glory and honor.  
 You made him ruler over the works of your hands;  
 you put everything under his feet:  
 all flocks and herds,  
 and the beasts of the field,  
 the birds of the air,  
 and the fish of the sea,  
 all that swim the paths of the seas.  
 O Lord, our Lord,  
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!

(Psalm 8)

He might also join Augustine in amazement that: "Men go abroad to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering."

The worldview of Genesis 2 stood over against the pagan worldviews that surrounded Israel. It reminded the people of God, that the one who called Abraham had created a good world and that the climax of that work was humanity.

This biblical outlook also challenges the inadequate views of humankind that exist today. Some esteem men and women no higher than other advanced animals, scoffing at the concept of "the image of God." Others reduce humans to robots in a highly determinative, closed system. An even more prevalent view in our culture seeks to tie human worth to matters of "success"—defined by beauty, athletic ability, power, intelli-

gence, or wealth.

It is little wonder that large segments of our society have little concern for the unborn, for those who are mentally handicapped, and for those who have aged beyond years of "productivity." It is also little wonder that we have so many with (what our therapeutic age is quick to call) self-esteem problems.

For us to be able to help, we must lay claim to our biblical heritage. I remember having a Harding student come to my office to describe her battle with self-esteem. She said she always felt ugly. Since this girl was beautiful by cultural standards, I tried to tell her that I thought she had a distorted view of herself, that nearly anyone would admire her looks.

Not long after that another girl visited with me who had the same struggle. The only difference was that she was indeed unattractive by the standards of our culture. It struck me that I had done the first student a great disservice. Any advice I gave to her that I could not give to the second was not biblical advice. With the first girl I tried to help her by reflecting back the standards of our world. I should have been sued for malpractice!

The way we help is by reminding people of the biblical story. People have great dignity because they were made in God's image. That image may be scarred and chiseled because of sin, but it is never removed. No childhood trauma, no divorce, no period of deep depression can remove that spark of the divine.

## HUMANITY'S FREEDOM—AND ITS LIMITS

The text also addresses the freedom God gave humans. He placed Adam in the garden with incredible liberty. But it was not an autonomous freedom. The man was required to live under the direction of his creator.

The Lord God told Adam that he was "free to eat from any tree in the garden." That is the exhilarating liberty. But he was also prohibited from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is the limitation on liberty.

How different this sounds from the post-modern despair that preaches the inevitability of human actions. We are told



that we are not able to choose because of sin (from a strict Calvinistic view) or because of our past. Most modern psychological theories assume that given certain circumstances, certain stimuli, we will produce inevitable responses.

There are dangers of this belief especially in much of the material being produced about co-dependency. Despite the very helpful insights, too often therapists leave the impression that the child of an alcoholic, abusive family is doomed to repeat similar behaviors.

Genesis counters by insisting on the dangerous gift of choice. God has given us the ability to decide whether we will obey or defy his divine Word, whether we will accept or reject his Son. In language we are familiar with, we are "free moral agents."

Even though this freedom is frightening—for we can choose to try to replace God—it is also enlivening. We are not at the mercy of ineluctable fate. We can choose whether or not to depend on God for life, whether or not to repeat the abusive sins of our parents, whether or not to live joyfully and courageously.

Genesis 2 forces us to recognize the limits of our wonderful freedom. Human sovereignty can never be taken too seriously; it can never quite be absolute.

Our age has become proficient at claiming its rights. The text reminds us that with the rights come duties. Both are found properly in the context of a loving Creator who must be heard and obediently followed.

## HUMANITY'S COMMUNITY

Genesis 2 also shows how God's creation relates to interpersonal relationships, especially to marriage. God sensed the loneliness of man. "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

So human community is born. God, after finding no suitable companion for Adam, created Eve. Adam, after seeing the giraffes, llamas, porcupines, and chimps, was undoubtedly elated when he witnessed God's new handiwork. You can almost hear him exclaiming, "That's better. Wrap her up—I'll

take her. . . . On second thought, don't bother wrapping her up!"

Their horizontal relationship was built upon the prior, vertical relationship. As Scripture consistently warns, human relationships can be nurtured properly only when God's sovereignty is respected.

One cornerstone for their marriage would be companionship. Adam and Eve are not pictured in a boss/employee or master/servant relationship. They are companions, sharing equal portions of honor and dignity and complementing one another. We can hardly overestimate how drastic a contrast this was to the way women were viewed in the Ancient Near Eastern world. God instilled his image within both male and female. He challenged both to fill the earth and allowed both to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:28). It is not surprising, then, to hear Paul say that in Christ "there is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Another cornerstone was the principle of severance: "A man will leave his father and mother." Winston Churchill had a favorite story of a man who made a desperate call to his minister to say that his mother-in-law had just died. The minister asked what he wanted done with the remains. The man quickly replied: "Embalm, cremate, and bury—take no chances."

God's word for marriage is that there must be a leaving before there can be this new beginning. It calls for a maturity that can live together before God without the control of others.

A third cornerstone is permanence. Adam was to "cleave" to his wife. To this passage Jesus returned when he was asked by some Pharisees about divorce. "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' . . . ? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Mt. 19:4-6). Just as God's dealings with people would be in the context of covenant, so human relations must be cemented by covenant. Nothing is needed in marriages more today than basic promise-keeping.



A fourth cornerstone is reverence. God is pictured as the bride's father, giving her to the groom. He is providing for both Adam and Eve. He was the one who made them and who knew how to bind them and keep them together.

### CONCLUSION

The words of Genesis 2 are so old. They spoke to another people in a world so much unlike our own.

And yet their relevance is haunting. They warn us that our therapy-hungry world is looking in all the wrong directions. They scream at us that our God is a loving God who desires to be intimate with us. They goad us to quit looking to the prophets of our own age for answers to our problems. They remind us that life can only be lived properly when it is lived in harmony with God.

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## PARADISE LOST

(Genesis 3—4)

Mark S. Howell

Say first—For Heaven hides  
nothing from thy view,  
Nor the deep tract of Hell—say  
first what cause  
Moved our grand Parents, in that  
happy state,  
Favoured of Heaven so highly, to  
fall off  
From their Creator, and transgress  
his will  
For one restraint, lords of the  
World besides.  
Who first seduced them to that  
foul revolt?<sup>1</sup>

Those lines are from the poem *Paradise Lost*, by the seventeenth-century Quaker John Milton. This dramatization of the creation and fall of man took seven years and twelve volumes to write, and it has been called "a literary epic, the greatest in the English language."<sup>2</sup>

The real "Paradise Lost" (Genesis 3—4), however, is more than a fanciful poem, or even a literary epic. It is an inspired explanation of beginnings that contains all the pathos of human existence: the story of two who had it all and lost it all on an ill-fated gamble to get more. It is the story of humanity, repeated countless times, to the tune of the same miserable conclusion—defeat at the hands of self-interest.

The real "Paradise Lost" is an account of man's own



contribution to the creation epic. God had brought into existence a wonderful universe that was good, by the word from his lips. Then man goes to work in Genesis 3 and brings into existence another universe, a darker, ominous universe, with the movement of his own lips. Something was discovered when Paradise was lost: **FALLENNESS!** Fallenness is a foreboding realm of dread and fear where every ugly feature of human nature reigns without restraint.

Fallenness can be described as a wheel with three spokes. Two of the spokes define it, and the third one promises its end. The two that define it are called "deceit" and "pain." The promise that limits Fallenness is called "hope." All of them are discovered in Genesis 3, when Paradise is miserably destroyed. Let us tour this text of the Lost and Found.

### PARADISE LOST IS DECEIT FOUND

Can you imagine a world where no deceit can be found? How beautiful it would be! Harmony upon the planet and within the universe—all of creation moving in singleness of purpose and unity! And there sits man in the middle of it, crowned with glory and honor (Ps. 8:5). Self-preservation would be on no one's mind, hang-ups and neuroses unknown! No burglar bars, no silent alarms, no sirens to chill the night, no overloaded legal systems—all because of the absence of deceit. That was the way it was intended to be. But something terrible happened in Genesis 3!

#### *The Birth of Deceit*

Onto this pristine scene slithers a rebellious creature. This crafty liar (Jn. 8:44) tempts the infant pair with an intoxicating plan to make themselves the bosses, all the while outwitting the Power that is. Who can resist that challenge? Their minds can almost be heard whirring as the subtle suggestion is made, thought over, and acted upon (Gen. 3:1-5).

And isn't the boldness of the lie stunning! It is a defiant assertion, "It is not as God says!" When the first children bought into that lie, everything changed. Belief in that lie caused them to reinterpret their lives and to redirect their

affection and ambitions.<sup>3</sup> The results were a curse, and humanity was fallen (Gen. 3:14-24).

This is the essence of Fallenness: misdirected love and energy. This misdirection comes from believing that God is the rival whose purpose is to keep our hands off of what is rightfully ours.

#### *Deceit Spawns an Ugly Brood*

When deceit gives birth to sin, self-fulfillment becomes the goal of life. Once the first pair began to think in terms of independence, the only things that mattered were their appetites (Gen. 3:6). Without the spiritual lifeline intact, satisfaction of the appetites becomes the only "fix" that boosts life along—a person is going to "find himself" somehow. Man's God-given need for significance and impact will not allow him to rest without fulfillment. The result is sin. Sin encourages sin, so the web gets deeper and tighter. No wonder sin and its effects are major subjects throughout the rest of the Bible!

The siblings of sin make for a raucous family: guilt, irresponsibility, death, decay, judgment. These are all the elements that make life a horror today, and they are all in place by the end of chapter 4. There man is seen squirming on the floor of God's creation, the painful victim of his own creative work. Look at him! How paltry is the claim of the humanist that man can save himself. How stark is the truth of Paradise Lost. Paul is right. Left to ourselves, mankind stumbles around in futility, darkness, exclusion, ignorance, hardheartedness, callousness, sensuality, impurity, and greed. We are truly corrupted by the "lusts of deceit" (Eph. 4:17-19, 22).

As terrible as it is, the discoveries are not over. Something else was found when Paradise was lost.

### PARADISE LOST IS PAIN FOUND

Man is caught in a worm hole that drafts him out of God's intended purpose and spews him into the Fallen universe of his own making. He wants to return on his own terms, but he is resisted by God himself (Gen. 3:24). Darkly the story of Genesis continues. In Gen. 6:5-7, the horrible reality of man's crea-



tive ability weakens the knees of God himself, and with hand to his head he calls for sweeping judgment. A spark of promise flashes in the pan as righteous Noah emerges to carry the torch. Flowers bloom once more as the precious fragrance of sacrifice wafts heavenward (Gen. 8:20-22). But failure's twisted face cackles again in Gen. 9:20-27, and more curses follow. As the debacle at Babel closes in chapter 11, the whole human experiment seems hopelessly smothered. It is truly a low point in biblical history; mankind is confused, scattered, alienated, and in pain.

And in 1991, the story continues. . . .

### *Why Do We Suffer?*

This question has haunted the ages. It is asked more than any other, and it is usually laid at the doorstep of God. In our clouded judgment we wonder why he allows it. There must be a reason for mosquitos, but what is it? How can God just look on as he does? "Surely God is good to Israel," Asaph wonders, "but why do the wicked drive Cadillacs and the righteous ride camels?" (Psalm 73). Even Jeremiah complained (Jeremiah 12).

It is okay to ask the question. God invites honest inquiry. The answer requires thoughtful consideration, for many are coming away with the wrong conclusions. The argument from evil has been tauted for centuries as the telling blow to theism. In its briefest form, the argument holds that evil and God cannot co-exist because God would be too good and too powerful to permit it. Since evil obviously does exist, God cannot exist, at least not a good and powerful God.

But the argument makes an assumption that the Bible nowhere makes. Its blunder is to assume that evil and God *cannot* exist together. The Bible says that not only can they co-exist, but that they certainly do co-exist.

But the argument from evil cannot be completely dismissed yet. The question still remains. Why do we hurt? Why does the omnipotent God not take it away?

Genesis 3 does not contain all the answers, but it does help put some of the pieces together. Let us ask four telling ques-

tions of this text.

### *Where Does Suffering Come From?*

The universe that God made demands that the possibility of evil exist. God did not create evil, but he did allow for the possibility of it; the potential is inherent in the creation. This particular universe could exist no other way.

The potential exists because man has the power of choice. Having the freedom to choose, the possibility of a wrong choice must be real, just as real as the consequences of that choice, or he is not really free. Genesis 3 tells us that man made wrong choices and suffered real consequences. The choice and the pain is his own doing. Sin (wrong choice) is man's creative activity.

"But what about an infant who is beaten to death by a drunken father? What wrong choice did the baby make?" None, but the drunken father made a choice, the implications of which must be fully realized.

"What about hurricanes, earthquakes, and mud slides then? No one makes a choice in those cases." But remember Gen. 3:17. As a result of man's sin, the *earth was cursed*. Thorns, thistles, and hardships became man's way of life as judgment over his sin. This is the language of an encroaching, untamed nature. Chaos has been unleashed, and Murphy's law has been turned loose. Things go wrong. Things like cancer, tornadoes, and lightening happen, but they happen because of the realm of Fallenness that man has created. Humanity is responsible for its pain!

### *Then Why Did God Give Man a Choice?*

God could have made this universe where beings would not make wrong choices, but they would not have been *human* beings! He could have made robots without choice, but not persons.

Persons are free to choose because persons were created to mature. What this means is that it is God's plan that human beings grow (mature) by making choices. We are being prepared for another world, and this current one can be looked upon as a sphere of soul-making.<sup>4</sup> A person does not have to



sin in order to grow, but he must make choices.

#### *Why Is There a Painful Penalty for Wrong Choices?*

The fact that there is a penalty at all for sin is because God is a God of justice. Heaven makes no deals with sin. All wrong choices must be punished. That is good, for if this were not a moral universe, it would be scary indeed!

But why are the penalties so painful? Why could mistakes not be painless? Perhaps it is because pain has a way of reeling us in. God pronounces pain to teach us a lesson (Gen. 3:17, 23). Pain serves a good purpose of making a person stop, or at least think about, what he is doing. We are punished in love so that we will be preserved and not destroy ourselves. Pain teaches us to correct and improve.<sup>5</sup>

#### *What Kind of God Is This?*

If God could foresee all the suffering that humans would bring upon themselves as well as every other living thing, why did he go ahead and create this kind of universe? Would it not have been better to abort the plan before the light of the first day?

Something must have been very valuable to God for him to justify this decision. What could be worth this kind of pain? Search the Scriptures and see what is of supreme value to God. It is relationship! At the heart of the universe is a God who craves *relationship*! What beauty and joy there is in another being freely choosing to love you and to be with you, for who you are. And the thrill of showering your own affection upon your beloved—there is nothing like that in heaven or on earth! God believes that loving man and having man love him is worth any conceivable risk! In Genesis 3, God is painted as Companion, as well as Sustainer, Creator, and Judge. How often the book of Genesis speaks of God's being "with" man. Many of the designations for God in Genesis reflect the intimate personal relationship between him and his people.<sup>6</sup>

It is not the case that man hurts just so God can love someone, and be loved. With great pain he runs his risks as well. In order for God to create a universe where people could have free will, he had to, in some sense, qualify his sovereignty.

If other beings were to choose, then he could no longer guarantee outcomes. Some things would be done that would be against his will and would hurt him. Add to that the ultimate pain he endured at Calvary, and maybe then we can begin to understand the value God places upon relationship. Oh, yes, God knows about risk and pain. And he says, "It is worth it. The creation of the universe is worth the pain! Man is worth the risk!" That leads us to the doorstep of one final discovery in Genesis 3.

### PARADISE LOST IS HOPE FOUND

Praise be to God, all is not lost! Hope glimmers in spite of man. *Paradise Lost* is the story of a brokenhearted God seeking after rebellious man. Real hope lies only in God. Stand up and shout! The promise and providence of God is greater than the sin and shame of man!

#### *The Emptiness of Life*

Since the Fall, the human race has been overwhelmed by the sense of pointlessness to life. Folks worry that the universe is out of control, if it has ever been in control, and that at its center is chaos, indifference, and coldness. Modern existentialist thought can be captured succinctly, "We have come from nowhere, we are going nowhere, and we are in no place in particular right now!"

Ancient man felt that life was pretty much out of his control. Modern man's notions are the same. The writings of Sarte, Neitzche, Camus, Driesser, Russell, Maurois, and others all concur: There is no rhyme, reason, or purpose to life. We just hurt, and it is all for nothing.

#### *The Message*

But there is a book that tells a different story. It tells of the events of an unseen hand weaving together the experiences of life in a way that speaks of a guided destiny to history.

The book begins with the writings called *Genesis*. Into a world where, in man's thinking, chaos was God, comes a message: "No! Man has done his best to destroy himself, but an



infinite Designer who loves and appreciates creation and life is in control. . . . Life is not bad; it is good!"

Yes, it tells the story of a miserable Fall. But in the middle of that fall, nestled amongst the curses, spoken to the enemy, is Gen. 3:15: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

It is called the *proto-evangelium*, the first glimmer of the gospel. But what does it mean? What was God talking about? Not even the angels knew at the time. The words fell to the tear-soaked dust and lay there, until the advent of one remarkable man.

### *The Good News*

No book captures the sweep of God's eternal purpose, the work of Jesus within that purpose, and the connection of God's plan with the events of Genesis 3 better than the book of Ephesians. In this book, we peer into the timelessness of eternity past and future. We read of God's purpose of restoring unity in the heavens and upon the earth through the work of Jesus Christ. Though disharmony and rebellion flooded in at the Fall, God seeks to restore creation to peace. By the blood of Jesus, he sets man right and proclaims to the world and the unseen realm that peace is in Jesus Christ and nowhere else. Separation came through Adam, but redemption comes through Christ. We find out that God's plan for unity comes about in the church itself, and that the church and the cross have been in the mind of God since before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:1-14; 2:1-7; 3:3-12).

Praise be to God! Time, space, sin, death, Satan, flesh—all combined are no match for him and his grace, working through his providence and promise.

With God there is hope. Whenever man alone is involved, darkness and despair are the results. But with God at the helm, though the way be fraught with many a snare, the faltering barque will be steered aright. We will not pass beyond the sphere of the Promise and Providence of God.

With mercy and with judgment  
My web of time He wove,  
And aye the dews of sorrow  
Were brightened by His love;  
I'll bless the hand that guided,  
I'll bless the heart that planned,  
When throned where glory dwelleth  
In Immanuel's land.

Anne R. Cousin

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Paradise Lost* 1.27-33.

<sup>2</sup>Rewey Belle Inglis and Josephine Spear, *Adventures in English Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), 232.

<sup>3</sup>Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 67.

<sup>4</sup>John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), 333-36.

<sup>5</sup>John T. Willis, *Genesis*, The Living Word Commentary, Vol. 2 (Austin, Tex.: Sweet Publishing Co., 1979), 54.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 53, 58.

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## NOAH: RIGHTEOUS AND BLAMELESS IN HIS TIME (Genesis 6—9)

Nokomis Yeldell, Sr.

The title of this year's lectureship, "Where Genesis Meets Life: Promises and Providence," should challenge our hearts in a very graphic manner.

We should be driven to shame when we see how men lived in this very early period when truth was dimly revealed. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son" (Heb. 1:1, 2). This lets us know that those souls did not enjoy the brightness of truth as we have today, but were, nonetheless, faithful.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he said, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). This verse was informing us that we should learn vital lessons from those worthy examples.

Under this great theme, my lesson will focus on Genesis 6—9. The heart of my subject matter is found in 6:9: "... Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations and Noah walked with God."

What greater qualities may one possess than those of being "just," "perfect," and to "walk with God"? I only wish that the epitaph on my grave will read that way and be true. So from these outstanding characteristics, I will develop my comments.

Moses records that Noah was a "just" man. Justice is a quality that is much needed and rare in our time. *The Merriam Webster Dictionary* says justice is "the action, practice or obligation of awarding each his just due: evenness, fairness,

impartiality."

When Micah announced God's requirements to Israel, justice was a part of those requirements. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8).

The quality of justice is needed in every relationship of life. The home, earth's oldest institution, would not be in the awful state it is in if those who make up the home practiced justice. Justice includes the Golden Rule, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Mt. 7:12).

A just husband treats his wife with the same justice that he expects of her. He considers her feelings, desires, dreams, aspirations, and hopes in the same manner he wants her to consider his. The wife who practices justice considers her husband in the same manner. This is the kind of man Noah was in his generation.

Alexander Maclaren says, "Noah stands alone in his generation like a single tree, green and erect in a forest of blasted and fallen pines. Among the faithless, faithful only he."

His character is described so to speak from outside inward. He is righteous or discharging all the obligations of law and of his various relationships. Noah without doubt was just to his wife as a good husband who discharged his duty. He was just to his sons as a good father. This is recognized because his family was first to believe his message concerning the flood. The world suffers for lack of good families where children are reared in the fear of God. Just men and women are needed in the work place. Employers need to be just. They need to be just in their dealing with their employees. They need to be just in their work requirements. They must be just in their pay. A just employee will be just in his work production. He does not need a boss man standing over him. He will do a just day's work if the boss is thousands of miles away. The Holy Spirit admonished the Ephesian Christians to be just in their dealings whether employers or employees.

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in single-



ness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him (Eph. 6:5-9).

Noah being a man of justice, whether he was an employer or employee, always put God first in his relationship with his fellowman. When the Holy Spirit calls a man just, little else is necessary. Noah evidently had the experience of working with and among very difficult people. There must have been times when it appeared he was being taken advantage of, but he looked to God to protect and keep him.

The second quality we want to consider is "perfect." "Noah was just and perfect in his generation" (Gen. 6:9). Maclaren says,

His whole nature is developed and all in due symmetry and proportions; no beauty wanting, no grace cultivated at the expense of others. He is a full man; not one-sided and therefore a distorted one. Of course we do not take these words to imply sinlessness. They express a relative, not an absolute completeness.

We have come to understand perfection as being perfect in growth. When a plant sprouts, it is perfect. When a blade of grass springs up, it is perfect. When it is ankle-high, it is perfect. In every stage of its growth, if it is growing properly, it is perfect.

Noah being perfect means that he recognized his own shortcomings and corrected them. No one is to rest satisfied with partial righteousness. He should ever seek to achieve complete perfection with reference to his Christian quest. Noah being perfect in his generation means he was ever growing in his knowledge of God. The writer of Hebrews made reference to his faith: "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not

seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Heb. 11:7). His faith in God caused him to ignore all the critics of his day. We believe Noah met with much opposition as he built the ark, but was not discouraged. He stood uncontaminated by the universal pollution of his day. Often a Christian may find himself or herself seemingly alone in some situations . . . among peers or on the job, but he must stand like an orchid among nettles and not be changed.

Without doubt, he grew toward perfection in his relationship to his God. As he grew toward perfection in his relationship to God, he grew toward perfection in relationship to his wife, his children, and every other relationship he sustained in his life. We are without excuse today because we have far better promises living in the age of the Son of righteousness. Remember Paul said to the Corinthians, "What advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32).

Noah, again without that promise and without the knowledge of living in a place called heaven, lived a perfect life in his generation. We are mindful that many will ask about Noah's drunken stupor after the flood. There has never been a single soul who has lived on this earth without sin except Jesus. Paul says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Perhaps Noah was not fully aware of the effects of wine. This is not to excuse him, not at all.

When we continue to read, we have no evidence of his repeating that sin. More was said in condemnation of his son Ham than is said about Noah. It was said of David that he was righteous to God save in the case of Uriah and his wife. It appears that Noah's drunken spree was his big mistake. Again, who is he or she among us who has not made one mistake?

The last quality I will address is that Noah "walked with God." Only two men have this distinction, Enoch and Noah. It is a compliment that all of us should desire. What makes it so outstanding was the time in which Noah lived. The first few verses of Genesis 6 give us a view of Noah's age.

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the



face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and took them wives of all which they chose (vv. 1, 2).

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at his heart (vv. 5, 6).

Noah's days were not days conducive to godly living. It was a time when sin was exceedingly sinful. Sin was excelerating, and licentiousness was running rampant. One of the special forms it assumed was that of sensuous gratification, leading to a violation of God's sacred law of marriage. In the seventh age, Lamech, the Cainite, became a polygamist, and it went on from there. We speak often of our day being exceedingly sinful, and I agree. We use that as a reason for our failure to do right. But in those awful days before the flood, men were wicked. The same temptations were the "lust of the flesh," the "lust of the eyes," and the "pride of life" (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

We may be able to travel faster and communicate quicker, but sin is always the same. To read that Noah walked with God in his time is amazing. When we realize that Noah walked with God, we are made to understand that there had to be a beginning. Men and women are not born saved, but safe. We do not know the circumstances of his life that caused him to make that decision. It is said of Enoch that he walked with God after he begat Methuselah. Whether or not the coming of that son caused him to come to God, we cannot be absolutely sure. But we do know there is no better time for a man to begin his walk with God than when God gives him a little "package" from heaven. If we will rear our children in the fear of God, we must walk with him. It is stated that Isaiah saw the Lord the year that Uzziah died. Isaiah, like many, thought he knew God until his hero was taken. Then and only then was he driven to a higher source. These are his words: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple" (Is. 6:1). It often takes a tragedy or a

triumph to bring one to walk with God. After several other revelations, Isaiah was made to realize his state. In Is. 6:5 he said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." After his cleansing, he was ready to walk with God and do his work. Then in verse 8 Isaiah said, "Here am I; send me."

It was when Moses, that great servant of God, came to years that he was willing to walk with his God. When he was taught by his mother (his nurse) how God had preserved him from death as an infant, how they by faith risked their lives to save him from the officers of Pharaoh, and how God gave Pharaoh's daughter a mother's heart as he cried in his ark of bulrushes and had kept him from all the dangers he encountered, he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season. Time fails me to go back and speak of Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Yes, there was a beginning of Noah's walk with God, and there is not anything more blessed than that. We have thrilled at walking with our parents, friends, and persons of great fame, and we felt honored and proud. But that day when one begins his or her walk with God is the greatest. When we think of all the other things that might have been said about Noah, we are made to see what is the supreme moment.

Noah may have achieved many great earthly honors and awards, but the only ones the Holy Spirit cared to record were that he was a just man and perfect in his generation and that he walked with God. He may have been a great orator, statesman, poet, and scholar, an astute businessman, and handsome. God only wanted it known that he was a just man and perfect in his generation and that he walked with God.

In order for Noah to walk with his God, he had to be in perfect agreement with him. Amos the prophet asked, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). It is impossible for two to walk together in disagreement. In the case of a man walking with God, he must agree with God in everything. We must speak only as Samuel did when God



called him that night: "Speak, Lord: for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:9). There is to be no controversy with him. Our world today, even our religious world, will question God's Word and claim to walk with him.

Noah's agreement is clearly seen in the building of the ark. There is not one instance of Noah's raising a question about a flood or rain or the dimensions of the ark. There were no questions about the one window and door or the need for escape routes or ventilation. He was in perfect agreement with God. The writer of Hebrews says it well: "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7).

Too many today have the Thomas faith: "Except I shall see . . . I will not believe" (Jn. 20:25). Noah did not say to God, "Show me what rain is and demonstrate what a flood is like, and I will believe it." He was in agreement with God, no matter how impossible something may have appeared to him. Paul says, "(For we walk by faith, and not by sight)" (2 Cor. 5:7). The only way to walk with God is to be in perfect agreement with him. From this man alone, we should see how Genesis meets life, promises and providence. The reason families are crumbling is that the husband and the wife are not in agreement with God and each other. When two try to walk together and one loves the architecture while the other loves only the symphony, they will not have a pleasing walk.

In order for Noah to walk with God, there had to be companionship. God was willing to walk with Noah and did. Companionship means helpers of each other. A story is told of a young businessman just out of college who asked a very successful man in his desired vocation if he would help him. The story suggests that the stately old gentleman got up from his desk, got his cane and hat, and said to the young man, "Come and go with me." They visited several places, and the senior gentleman introduced the young man to many of his business associates. Soon they returned to his office, and he wished the youth well in his life's venture. The young man said to his idol, "Sir, you

never said that you'd help me." The elderly statesman straightened up in his chair and said, "Young man, if you don't know that I helped you today, I have serious concern about you. You see, son, when I walked with you, I helped you!" People do not see me walking with anybody. God does not walk with anybody. He walks with those who are willing to follow his orders without doubt. God wants to be a companion to each of us.

Finally, in order for Noah to walk with God, he had to have absolute trust in him. Too often we put trust in our own hearts. Solomon said, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered" (Prov. 28:26).

C. H. Spurgeon speaks it thus, "When after many a weary wandering, the dove of our soul has at last come back to the ark, and Noah has put out his hand and pulled her in unto himself." The poor weary creature is happy. Taken into Noah's hand and made to nestle in his bosom, she feels so safe and so peaceful! The weary leagues of the wild waste of waters are all forgotten or only remembered to give zest to the repose. So when you trust in God, your soul has found a pavilion of repose.

Noah walked with God because he had truly learned to trust God and found himself that safe haven. Half-trust is not trust at all.

As a boy on the farm, I learned how little chicks and animals found comfort and safety with their mothers and felt quiet and safe from a danger. When Noah entered the ark that God had instructed him to build, he took his little family with him with complete confidence that God whom he served and with whom he walked would save him and his family from the angry waters.

We, too, must learn to have that trust in God and his might. We must trust him with our souls. We trust his gospel to be his power to salvation. We are taught to hear his Word, believe his Word, repent of our sins, confess faith in him, and be baptized into him, and he will save us in our obedience to his commands. In Eph. 1:13, Paul says, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit



of promise."

Someone has said that "trust" in God is the sum total of religion. Trust, you see, is the root of true fear. Without faith, it is impossible to please him. Let a man trusting in the Lord know that he has done the grandest thing that can be done. When the Jews asked, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said unto them, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (Jn. 6:28, 29).

In conclusion, as we study the life and faith of this great man of the past, we are made to realize that if we are just and perfect and we walk with God, we will find favor in God and will be used of him.

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## ABRAHAM: BELIEVING THE PROMISES (Genesis 12—22)

Neale T. Pryor

When I was in the tenth grade, my world history teacher asked the class to define faith. After a number of attempts were made, I raised my hand and said, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The teacher was astounded at the wisdom of this reply. I heard one student in the back of the room say, "He didn't make that up. He got it from somewhere else." The teacher replied, "I don't care where he got it from. It is a wonderful definition of faith." The teacher had me write it on the board for all the class to see. It stayed there for several weeks. I never did tell her or the class that I was quoting Heb. 11:1. Perhaps, sometime I should go back and say where I got it.

Heb. 11:1 beautifully describes the essence of a true faith. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is well called "The Faith Chapter." It is appropriate that the largest section in the chapter deals with Abraham, the father of the faithful.

In the section on Abraham and his family, verses 8 through 19, three great tests of Abraham's faith are mentioned. Each one prepares him for the next one.

### TO LEAVE HOME

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out not knowing where he was going (Heb. 11:8).<sup>1</sup>

Abraham was called to leave his home on two occasions. He received his first call in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2, 3). After this call he left Ur with his family, including his father and



brother's family, to go to Haran. After the death of Terah, his father, God called Abraham a second time, this time to go into the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1-3). After Abraham had entered the land of Canaan, he and Lot parted company (Genesis 13). God gradually separated him from his homeland and his family.

The first test of Abraham's faith was to give up what was dear to him and to rely on God. It took a great deal of faith for a seventy-five-year-old man to go out into a land he did not know for a reason he did not understand, except that God told him to do it. He "went out, not knowing where he went."

When Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, he certainly did not see where his journey would take him, but he was willing to give up whatever was necessary to please God. He believed God when he said, "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all of the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

The only problem arose when Abraham decided that he should take matters in his own hands. When he went into Egypt, he lied about Sarah's being his wife and claimed that she was his sister, thinking this would protect him from the Egyptians.

Following God means burning our bridges behind us. Jesus told one disciple who would follow him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:62).

Most of us do not want to give up anything until we have something else in hand. We do not want to give up the job we have until we know we can get a better job, just as a child does not want to give up the toy he has unless he has hold of another one. We cannot see the end of the road, nor understand why the steps of Jesus lead where they do, but we know that they lead home.

Then at last when on high he sees us,  
Our journey done,  
We will rest where the steps of Jesus  
end at his throne.

## BELIEVE THE UNBELIEVABLE

And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet with the respect of the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God. And being fully assured that what he was promised, he was able also to perform (Rom. 4:19-21).

This test of Abraham's faith was to believe that which was hard to believe.

This was made doubly hard by the fact that Abraham had to wait twenty-five years for God's answer to his promise. He offered to adopt his servant Eliezer in order to help God fulfill the promise (Gen. 15:2), and he even tried to solve the problem by having a child through the handmaid (Genesis 16).

On one occasion God asked Abraham if he could count the stars. He told him, "So shall your descendants be" (Gen. 15:6). About fifteen years later, God changed Abram's name to Abraham, from "exalted father" to "father of a multitude." Abraham and Sarah would have such a multitude of descendants that his name needed to be changed to fit the circumstances. Finally, when Abraham was one hundred and Sarah ninety, twenty-five years after the promise of the child was given, Isaac was born.

Often the greatest test of our faith is waiting. The silence of God is sometimes the hardest part of life to deal with. It is hard to realize that God does not run on the same schedule that humans do. A day is with him as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day.

The sin of impatience has caused many problems. Take for example the golden calf incident after Moses had been gone for forty days and nights (Exodus 32), or Saul's offering the sacrifice because he grew tired of waiting for Samuel to come and do it (1 Sam. 13:8-14). When the fifth seal was opened in the Book of Revelation, the souls of those who had been slain were seen under the altar asking God, "How long?" (Rev. 6:10), a question often asked by us all.



Faith is not based on irrational superstition or feelings. There are good reasons for believing in God. We are encouraged to make a defense to everyone who asks us to give an account for the *reason* of the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15).

But there are times when we have to trust because we cannot understand or see. Job had no idea why his misfortunes came upon him. His friends thought they knew; it was because Job had sinned. Job knew that sin was not the problem, but he did not know the reason for his suffering. Yet he still trusted God (Job 13:15). "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15). Habakkuk had trouble understanding why God was using the Chaldeans to punish his people. The prophet concluded by saying that whatever happens, he still would trust in God (Hab. 3:17-19).

Many times we cannot give a rational explanation for what God has commanded or understand why things happen to us. Sometimes we simply have to trust in God.

A fellow preacher and I were visiting with a young man who was struggling with questions of this nature. He asked us why God would allow certain things to happen, why things were as they were, and of course we did not know—no human knows. My friend said to him, "A God that I could completely understand wouldn't be much of a God, would he?" God's thoughts are not our thoughts; neither are our ways his ways, "for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Is. 55:9).

There are times in our lives, as in the life of Abraham, when we believe God even though we cannot understand him. Because he has proved true in the past, we have reason to trust him; and there are times when God simply calls upon us to rely upon that trust.

### TO OFFER HIS SON

By faith Abraham when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who received the promises was offering up his only begotten son (Heb. 11:17).

The third test of Abraham's faith is a combination of the previous two. First, it obviously was a challenge to give up that which was dearest to him, a sacrifice far greater than leaving his homeland and going to a land that he did not know. It seems this is an unreasonable request to make of any man. But God never asks of us what he himself is unwilling to do. Near Mount Moriah, where Isaac was offered, about two thousand years later, God offered his son. Only this time there was no one to stop the execution.

Second, the third test of Abraham's faith was a test to believe the unbelievable. This was similar to the challenge to believe that he would have the child when he was past age. It was difficult, first of all, for Abraham to understand how a merciful God could ask this of anyone. A God who had always forbidden child sacrifice certainly would not contradict himself by commanding one of his servants to offer his child. Even more than this, how could Isaac have a multitude of descendants, as God has promised, if he was to be killed while still a young boy?

Abraham believed that, if necessary, God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to keep the promise that he would be the father of a great multitude. "He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type" (Heb. 11:19).

### CONCLUSION

Two main elements in walking by faith are to be willing to go where God leads regardless of what it costs and to believe what God says though sometimes we do not understand why. Abraham's life illustrates both of these elements of faith. He *believed the promises* and trusted in the One who gave them. He was the only person in the Bible to be called the friend of God. Perhaps this is because of his great faith.

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>All quotations are from the New American Standard Version.



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## JACOB

(Genesis 24—35)

Robert K. Oglesby

Every man dreams of walking closer to God. We, like Adam and Eve, yearn to feel his presence. Like children, we long to be confident of his approval. I want you to think of a man who had that promise.

If we had the opportunity to walk nearer to God, we would immediately be awestruck. When Isaiah the prophet came into the presence of the Almighty, he cried out, "Woe is me . . . for I am a man of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). The gap between God and us seems unbridgeable. We do not feel good enough to stand that close to God.

If you thirst for God's presence, walk with me as I review one man's lifelong journey toward God. If you fear to take the plunge yourself, take heart. No matter how bad you think you are, this man was no better. Yet at last he found God. His path was paved with the promises and providence of God. The man who walked that path was named Jacob, and his story is recorded in Genesis 24—35.

## BIRTH

Most modern biographers begin with the birth of a baby destined to become famous. God's story about Jacob, however, begins not at his birth but before his birth. Like so many thrilling Old Testament stories, it starts with a barren woman who hoped against hope to one day become a mother. Since Rebekah had not borne children, she felt as though she were a failure. Motherhood in our society is viewed as an option. In Rebekah's day, motherhood was the fashionable "in thing." A



woman's place in those days was not in the office or in the shopping mall. Next to being a wife, motherhood was a woman's supreme ambition.

Few alternatives existed in the ancient world for solving the problem of childlessness. Gynecologists and fertility clinics were not available to Rebekah. Instead, prayer was her first and last resort. This barrenness had, no doubt, been the subject of many discussions between Isaac and Rebekah, because the Scripture says, "Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife" (Gen. 25:21).

In God's good time, Rebekah was with child. She expected some discomfort and perhaps some movement in her womb, but she was not prepared for the storm of movement she got. When she asked the Lord, "Why?" his answer was mysterious. First, she was told she would have twins. Second, God said the two sons represented two nations. Furthermore, the prediction also revealed that, contrary to normal Hebrew custom, the elder would serve the younger. In the twentieth century, we expect sibling rivalry in the back seat of the car on a long trip. Cries of, "He's sitting on my side, Mother," and "Daddy, make him quit looking at me," are normal experience. Having the kids start fighting before they are born is not something to which we are accustomed. Everything about this birth, however, was filled with meaning. God's promise and providence were already at work, even before the good news about twins spread through the family.

If we think the signs before birth were strange, the signs at birth were even more unusual. Esau was born first and gained the prized possession of being the "first-born" son. Jacob lost the race by seconds, but those present at the birth were puzzled and perhaps awed by the fact that Jacob entered the world hanging on his brother's heel. His name, Jacob, carried with it the meaning of "heel catcher." This momentary birth oddity was probably soon forgotten, but its prophetic meaning followed Jacob all his life.

We see by their completely different physical descriptions that Jacob and Esau were fraternal twins, not identical twins. Identical twins share so much genetic similarity that they are

usually very much alike. Modern research shows this likeness is inevitable with twins, even when they are separated at birth. About the only thing Jacob and Esau shared was the same womb. Otherwise, they were as different as daylight and dark.

## BOYHOOD

The differences foreshadowed by their births were further accented by their boyhood. Esau was an outdoorsman and loved to hunt in the fields. He was what we today would call a "macho man." He was a man's man. Esau was inclined to act more than talk. Subtle things like birthrights did not impress Esau. He seemed to live for the here and now and did not worry much about tomorrow. With such traits, Esau became a "daddy's boy." In all honesty, most of us today might have preferred Esau over Jacob. So we are puzzled why God rejected this man. Still, we watch as God works out his providence in this man's life.

Jacob was the opposite of his brother. Roaming into the fields did not interest him. He preferred to stay around the tent. Furthermore, his pliable qualities appealed to Rebekah, so Jacob became a classic "mama's boy." His submissive quality also made him the ideal co-conspirator with his mother. If we stopped the story at this point, you might want to whisper some offstage instructions for God to change his choice. To our limited view, Jacob does not look like a promising choice for God's role of faith leadership.

## ADULTHOOD

### *The Young Adult (Jacob)*

We honestly have to view Jacob's young manhood years with disappointment. Judged by the best ethics of society, he does not look like a promising candidate for greatness. Still, we remember God's promise to Jacob, and we watch God's providence unfold.

The two boys develop side by side. Esau is open and direct in



his dealings. Unfortunately, we now begin to see some downside risk in a man of Esau's temperament. He valued sacred things cheaply, and Jacob was always ready to cleverly take advantage of Esau's weaknesses. When Esau came home from an unsuccessful hunting trip one day, he was famished. Jacob had pottage on the fire and ready to eat. When Esau asked for some of it, Jacob struck a bargain to give the pottage in exchange for the precious first-born birthright. Esau's reasoning was practical. What good would a birthright do him if he died of hunger? So he sold his birthright cheaply, ate his fill, and went merrily on his way. The writer of Hebrews in the New Testament chides Esau for being a "profane person" (Heb. 12:16). By this the writer meant that Esau treated his sacred birthright as though it were common. As the story gently unfolds, we begin to understand why God did not choose Esau.

Even though we might agree for God to reject Esau, we are still left with the mystery of why God would choose Jacob. We hope Jacob will make some quick improvements. Instead, Jacob gets worse. Jacob took unfair advantage of Esau in buying the birthright, but we must not forget that Esau did accept the bargain. From that point, the story really starts downhill. Isaac had planned to pronounce a blessing on Esau. Research indicates this is how patriarchs "wrote their wills" in those days. Since they could not file their wills at the local county courthouse for later probate, they expressed them orally for the family record. Before he did this ceremony, Isaac wanted his favorite meal of venison. While Esau was hunting, Rebekah and Jacob conspired to feed Isaac a meal of goat meat. Jacob was disguised with goatskin on his arms and neck so he would feel like Esau. Thus did Jacob, with the help of his mother, slide from unfair opportunism into outright deceit. Jacob's voice almost trapped him, but the goatskin fooled poor blind Isaac, and he gave Jacob the blessing. Archaeology suggests, and the Bible confirms, that this oral ceremony was as binding as a legal document today. Not even the anger and tears of Esau nor the regret of Isaac could change it once it was done. As we stand looking at this ancient scene today, we are mystified. How can God ever bless this man Jacob? We must be

patient, however, for God is not finished with Jacob.

Esau has had enough. Jacob has unfairly bought his birthright and now stolen his blessing. Esau vowed in his heart to murder his brother once their father was dead. To avert this tragedy, Rebekah dreamed up a plan. In her usual style, she offered Isaac a plausible reason for Jacob to leave home. She wanted her boy to marry a girl from among her kinfolk back in Padan-aram, and not one of the local Canaanite women. Rebekah would be a good salesperson for Christian education today. She knew that young adults marry from the available pool of prospects around them. We increase the chances of our children choosing a Christian mate when we put them in a Christian education environment while they are looking for a husband or wife.

Jacob's journey altered the course of his life. When he bedded down at Luz the first night, he felt alone. His dream of angels descending from heaven on a ladder caused him to rename that spot Bethel, which means "house of God." His conclusion was, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it" (Gen. 28:16). Jacob's consciousness of God's presence began here. He, like many young adults leaving home, went in search of his own faith and face God the first time.

The Bethel experience was just the beginning of Jacob's training in God's service. The Lord had many more experiences in store for him. Each experience was abrasive, but together they taught and transformed Jacob. First, he providentially found beautiful Rachel, a kinswoman, drawing water for her father's flock. In time, Jacob agreed to serve seven years in order to have Rachel as his wife. As difficult as this wait must have been for Jacob, the Bible describes his attitude in one of the loveliest lines of the Bible. Gen. 29:20 says of the seven years, "And they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her." Jacob's first disappointment came on his wedding night when he discovered his father-in-law, Laban, had substituted Rachel's older sister, Leah, for his bride. Whereas Rachel was called beautiful, Leah had some kind of trouble with her eyes so that she was perceived as less than beautiful. Jacob, however, knew when he was defeated. He had



paid for Leah "in advance." Laban's sole concession in the bargain was that Jacob could now have Rachel in a week, if he would agree to pay seven more years for her on the "installment plan." This is Jacob's first defeat. Now for the first time, he learned how it felt to be the cheated, instead of the cheater.

Jacob settled down with his two wives and continued to serve his father-in-law. Two conflicts rule this stage of Jacob's life. The first was that Rachel was barren and Leah was not. Rachel, after the custom of the times, used her handmaid as a surrogate wife and had children by her with Jacob. Out of this intense childbearing competition, Jacob emerged years later with twelve sons and one daughter. The second life conflict Jacob endured was Laban's scheming to keep changing Jacob's wages. First, Laban would promise a certain type of cattle would be Jacob's wages. Then when the herd produced a lot of that type cattle, Laban would change his mind and alter the agreement. Finally, Jacob realized his only hope was to sneak off from Laban and return to the promised land of his birth. When Jacob did so, Laban caught his caravan in a few days. No harm came to Jacob, however, because God warned Laban in a dream to be very careful how he treated Jacob. The two men agreed to a truce, and after an absence of twenty years, Jacob turned his face homeward. The bittersweet experiences of these two decades humbled him into a sadder but wiser man.

### *The Mature Man (Israel)*

Even now as Jacob returns to his roots, his old sin is waiting for him. God has changed his present and his future, but the past waits to haunt him. When he heard Esau was coming to meet him, he was afraid murder was still in his brother's heart. Jacob sent ahead gifts to appease Esau's anger, and he himself spent the night wrestling with an angel. We do not know exactly what to make of this mysterious experience with God's messenger, but out of it Jacob gained a name change. Jehovah now saw something different in Jacob. No longer would he be a "heel catcher" (Jacob). As God's man, he would henceforth be known as a "prince of God" (Israel). Jacob met Esau, and all was forgiven.

Jacob's story now begins to sound like the "happy ending" we all love to hear. God's longsuffering patience at last seems vindicated. Jacob's sons begat twelve families and became the twelve tribes of ancient Israel. In a way the world had never known before, Israel's children became God's chosen nation. Not even the trip to Egyptian bondage could change that destiny. The promise of God to bless the world through the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob came true. The lean years are past for Jacob. He started life as a flawed and weak man, but he eventually emerged like a spiritual butterfly from the cocoon of God's providence. His metamorphosis had been slow but sure. Our last glimpse of Israel occurs in Egypt where we see him sitting on the side of his deathbed, blessing his descendents, then gathering his feet up into the bed and dying.

## CONCLUSION

Life had been a long journey for Jacob. From womb to tomb, it had been a series of struggles. Somehow God used this competitive man to work out his will. Jacob struggled with man and with God. At last he prevailed. After Jacob's "white water" struggles, he finally found the peace of quiet waters when he changed enough to become God's prince, Israel. In that role, Jacob raised his family, built a nation, and faithfully kept his promises to God.

Where are you on your journey? If you are not happy with where you have started, believe God's promise and rely on his providence to re-shape your life. If your life still looks disappointing, try to remember that, as with Jacob, God may not be finished with you yet.

We often sing a moving song entitled "Nearer, My God, to Thee." Many sing it but may not realize it is about the patriarch Jacob. For our edification, the songwriter put Jacob's story to music. The song relives that night when a young, homesick "mama's boy" named Jacob went to sleep in a garden feeling a million miles away from God. He discovered through his dream that God is never far away. May we, like Jacob and the apostle Paul, realize that "in Him, we live, and move, and have



our being" (Acts 17:28). God will always be there to help us and change us if we believe his precious promises and rely on his powerful providence. Then, like Jacob, we will truly come "Nearer, My God, to Thee."

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## THE GOD BACKSTAGE

(Genesis 37—50)

Harold Shank

## BEHIND HAPPY FACES

Sören Kierkegaard told a story about a man walking down a city street in Europe. A sign in a shop window said, "Pants Pressed." The man went into the store, walked behind the counter, and started undoing his trousers. A clerk asked, "What are you doing?" The man replied, "I want my pants pressed. I saw your sign." The clerk said, "We don't press pants here. We just paint signs."

Just as signs often mislead us about the function of certain businesses, Kierkegaard teaches us that we can get the wrong impression by looking only at the outside of a person. A calm facade may cover confusion or lack of direction on the inside. Often people who appear to be alive merely exist.

It certainly happens to individuals. Steven Brown, a preacher in Florida, assumes that although the people look happy on the outside, seven out of ten in his congregation have broken hearts.<sup>1</sup> In *Struggles of the Kingdom*, Jim Woodroof suggested that being in a church of Christ on Sunday morning does not make a person a believer.<sup>2</sup> He meant that experiences in life can temporarily rob us of faith. Bruce Thielemann observed that in the average audience, 35 per cent faced troubled marriages, 40 per cent verged on depression, and 50 per cent hated their work.<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard is right. The sign on the outside misleads.

Congregations face the same uncertain interiors. Some 350,000 churches dominate the American scene. But church growth expert Win Arn points out that each year in America, both the number and percentage of people not attending



church increases. In recent years, half of all American churches have had no conversions. Fully 85 per cent of the congregations in America are plateaued or in decline.<sup>4</sup>

The latest edition of Mac Lynn's work indicates churches of Christ grew by 3 per cent from 1979 to 1990, or an increase of 43,236 people. Each congregation gained 3.38 people over the past eleven years, or one-third of a person per year.<sup>5</sup> According to a local study, churches of Christ in Shelby County, Tennessee, had 15,552 members in 1980. By 1990, we dropped to 15,226, a loss of 326 people.

Behind the faces of American Christianity are unhappy marriages, unbelieving people, and brokenhearted Christians attending stagnant churches without any clear sense of purpose. What has happened? What is wrong?

Is there something missing? Are we just in a lull? Have we just misread the statistics? Have we lost our direction? Are we just drifting aimlessly along?

Answers to these questions may come from one of the best known and loved, most moving and persuasive tales in the Bible—the story of Joseph. Joseph lived long before the church. He never knew Jesus Christ or heard the word “evangelism.” Joseph knew nothing of our situation, but he discovered something in his life that we must discover in ours if we want our individual and church lives to have direction. He learned something about living that we may have forgotten. He understood a crucial issue that, if understood today, will make a vital difference in our spiritual lives.

## PITS AND PINNACLES

Joseph could identify with our confusion and pain. From the depths of the pit, he could barely hear the table talk of his plotting brothers. As the slave traders carried him away in shackles, no doubt he could see his brothers dip his wonderful coat in a pan of goat's blood. On the auction block next to the Nile, he hopes that a kind man will buy him as a slave. Watching the roaches scamper over the diseased bodies of his fellow inmates, Joseph longs for freedom. His feet hurting from the

fetters and his neck rubbed raw by the iron collar, Joseph faces difficult tests. Years of separation from his family made him look on Egypt as the land of his affliction. Yet Joseph's life began on a better note.

At the beginning, the future seems bright for Joseph. Favorite son with a special coat, he stays home while his brothers work. But his dreams cloud the horizon. When Joseph envisions the sheaves bowing down to him, the brothers respond, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to have dominion over us?” His second dream about the sun, moon, and stars bowing down further embitters his brothers.

The reaction to the dreams sets the stage for the story. His brothers understand the point of his dreams and hate him for it. His father comprehends the meaning and rebukes him for it. How did Joseph understand the dreams? In the pit, in the clutches of the slave trader's chains, in the employ of a foreign general, perhaps Joseph wonders what the dreams mean and why his life had careened out of control.

Down in Egypt, the story continues. Potiphar left all he had in Joseph's charge—all except his wife. The only thing outside his power became the one thing that led to his loss of power. Mrs. Potiphar screamed, and Mr. Potiphar sent Joseph to jail. The prison warden put all the prisoners under Joseph's care. Stripped of his clothes and power by the Potiphars, he now gets both prison garb and prison power. When he meets Pharaoh's butler and baker, Joseph hopes to make his own dream come true, but the lines get clogged and Joseph rots in prison.

Finally, Pharaoh himself dreams, and Joseph, who had left his coat in the pan of goat's blood and his manager's uniform in Mrs. Potiphar's hands, now leaves his prison clothes on the jailroom floor as Egyptian officials usher him into the presence of Pharaoh.

Now the boy who was put into the pit, pulled into bed, and cast into prison is propelled to the throne in Genesis 41. Pharaoh puts Joseph over his house, his people, and the land of Egypt. Seated next to Pharaoh, he wears the king's robe, chain, and ring, and rides second in the royal motorcade. When Joseph comes by, the people of Egypt unknowingly repeat the



vision of the boyhood dream, "Bow the knee, bow the knee." The boy who had dreamed of the solar system at his feet has every official, soldier, and farmer in Egypt at his feet.

Joseph excels in Egypt. Not only does he master the Egyptians, but he rules over his brothers. The hungry sons of Jacob come to Egypt twice to get food. In chapters 42, 43, and 44, the brothers fulfill the dreams of their younger sibling and bow down before him. Like bundles of grain, the brothers bend before Joseph. Like mere stars, they recognize a higher power.

### THE GOD BACKSTAGE

What message does the story have for us? We have a tragic tale of a boy away from home. We have the ups-and-downs of a Hebrew slave from Palestine. What direction for life do we get from this story? How could any of this relate to the confusion and lack of direction we feel?

Three times Genesis tells us the point of this story. *The first group of texts appears in Genesis 39.* The slave traders deposit Joseph in Egypt. The action starts. Joseph rises to power in Potiphar's house and then becomes the number two man in prison. The Egyptians see the external story. But another series of events takes place behind the scenes.

Potiphar and the prison warden might have eyed Joseph as a potential administrator or excellent management material. The slave traders calculated the odds of making a quick buck and Mrs. Potiphar a quick thrill. But that was only part of the story. It was not the vision of "daddy's little dreamer boy" or the skills he learned playing while his brothers were out shepherding that swept Joseph into Pharaoh's house. Another factor controlled his life.

Five times in twenty-two action-packed verses, we are told what happens: "The *Lord* was with Joseph and he became a successful man" (39:2)<sup>6</sup>; "His master saw that the *Lord* was with him, and that the *Lord* caused all that Joseph did to prosper in his hands" (39:3); "The *Lord* blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the *Lord* was upon all that he had, in house and field" (39:5); "The *Lord* was with

Joseph and showed his steadfast love, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (39:21); "Because the *Lord* was with him; and whatever he did, the *Lord* made it prosper" (39:23).

God worked! Providence provided! The Almighty moved! At its fundamental level, this story tells us that God works. He lives! He acts! God works for us.

*The second group of texts which confirm the point of this story comes in Genesis 45.* After years of separation, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. Joseph recognizes that behind all the pits and prisons, behind all the missed family times and living in a foreign land, God worked without their knowledge.

Joseph speaks to his brothers: "For God sent me before you to preserve life" (45:5); "And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant" (45:7); "It was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:8); "God has made me Lord of all Egypt" (45:9).

We thought it was the ten naughty sons who sent their Cinderella brother on his way to Egypt, but behind the nasty plans of envious brothers was another force. Not only did another power propel Joseph to great heights in Egypt, his brothers did not work alone when they sold him into slavery. God worked behind the scenes.

*The third text comes in Genesis 50.* With father Jacob safely entombed in Palestine, the eleven sons come bowing before Joseph, fearing his power, wondering about the fulfillment of the boyhood dream, seeking his pardon for their sin. In response, Joseph makes one of the clearest theological statements in the thirteen chapters: "Don't fear me. Am I in the place of God?"

Am I God? What an interesting question! Is Joseph God? At times, the brothers thought so. At times, the Egyptians thought so. On occasion, it seemed that Joseph thought so. Perhaps even the reader believes it. This Joseph who controls all that Potiphar has except his wife, who cares for all the warden's prison, who stands at the right hand of Pharaoh, who towers over his eleven brothers who bow before him in fear, this Joseph is not the ultimate power. By his own admission,



Joseph himself and his dreams are under another power far beyond himself.

The frightened brothers think that Joseph controls their world. The brothers who thought they understood their little brother's dream in Genesis 37 now do not understand at all. Only Joseph comprehends the lesson: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." He was saying, "You thought you were selling me into slavery. I thought it was the end of my dream. You thought it was the end of me. I thought it was the end of you. But God used it all to keep us alive." God worked in spite of what they did.

The brothers miss the point. Burdened with guilt, trembling in fear, they have no idea who arranged the last thirteen chapters. Joseph knew. God controls. The story tells us that behind the scenes of life, in the pits and in the prisons, in the dreams and in the famines, from king to slave, from family to master, another power backstage has ultimate control. The brothers had freedom. They used it for evil. Mrs. Potiphar had free will. She used it for sin. Joseph had control. He used it for revenge on his brothers. But every scene rests in the controlling hand of a powerful God.

### JOSEPH, YES. BUT WHAT ABOUT US?

Providence worked for Joseph, but does God always work for people? Does God do for us what he did for Joseph?

The New Testament book of Acts offers a clear answer to these questions. Acts provides us with examples of repentance, the centrality of baptism, and taking the Lord's Supper on Sunday. But Acts tells us about more than just these doctrinal points. The people who move across these pages knew one central fact: God works.

Peter's first words in Acts 2 tell people that the events of the day occurred not because of a group of drunken men, but because of God. After the baptisms, fear came on every soul because they sensed the work of God.

When the authorities bring Peter and John before them in

Acts 4, they ask the two where they got the power to do these things. Peter points to God. When they return to the church, Peter and John tell what occurred, and the people lift their voices as one, praising God for working among them.

Acts records the church assembling for services twenty-two times. In ten of these meetings, they emphasize God's work among them. Acts 14:27 indicates that the preachers "declared all that God had done with them and how he had opened a door of faith." At the beginning of another church meeting, the preachers "were welcomed by the church and the elders and they declared all that God had done with them" (Acts 15:4).

William Abraham, in *The Logic of Evangelism*, wonders what made these early Christians so evangelistic.<sup>7</sup> They did not have the Jule Miller filmstrips. They did not have tracts or television advertisements. They did not even have New Testaments. Motivation came not from a public relations firm, a training program, or guilt. The gospel spread in the first century because the church was convinced that the hand of God was in the middle of their community.

Not only do the doctrines of repentance, baptism, and the Lord's Supper need to be restored today, but modern Christians also need to renew their belief in the providence of God. Rom. 8:28 capsulizes the whole biblical doctrine of providence when it reminds us that "in everything God works for good with those who love him." Perhaps we would be more convinced that God works if we took more time when we are together to rehearse what God does in our lives.

### TROUBLES AND PROVIDENCE

Even though we can see the clear teaching about God's providence in Scripture, troubles and suffering sometimes suggest to us that God's providence fails. How can God be with me when times are so bad? What good can come from this turn of events? Joseph could tell stories of pits, entrapment, prison, and broken promises that outdo most of ours. Yet even with those ups-and-downs, Genesis maintains that God worked in Joseph's life.



French sculptor Rodin carved two hands out of stone. Both hands contain small human figures. Rodin polished one piece smooth, suggesting peace and calm. He named it "The Hand of the Devil." The other sculpture hammered out of rough rock has the hand moving upward. The sharp edges of the rock bite into the human figure. Rodin called the second sculpture "The Hand of God."<sup>8</sup>

We prefer the smooth hand but will not like its owner. Much better to take the hand holding the rough edges of life, knowing it is connected to the heart of God. Providence with its ups-and-downs outranks the second-best option.

James A. Harding, co-founder of David Lipscomb University and namesake of Harding University, preached for a number of churches in his younger years. One January, he reported that he and his song leader used the entire month for gospel meetings. They spent \$37.10 in travel and advertising. The churches paid them \$1.50, leaving a deficit of \$35.60. Someone asked Harding how he lived. He said that one man they spent the night with handed him \$13.00. He got a letter with a check for \$25.00. Another businessman sent \$10.00. He said that left him a balance of \$12.50 for travel and family. He said, "If I had needed more money, I would have received it. It is not necessary for a man to carry money about in his pockets that he has no need for. The Father furnishes it as it is needed."<sup>9</sup>

Most of us never reach Joseph's level of faith. Maybe Harding did. We can call Joseph unlucky and consider Harding a poor provider, or we can join them in believing that God works.

Genesis tells us God provides. Behind all the terrible dictators, above all the storm clouds, beyond all the talk of recession and inflation, hidden under all layers of human pain is a loving and kind God who, regardless of what we do to ourselves or what others do to us, works for our benefit.

## CONFUSION AND PROVIDENCE

Despite the biblical insistence that God works, his people continually forget, plunging themselves into lives of confusion.

A couple of years ago, a large Texas church considered a building addition. Things were not going well with the project. One Sunday morning, an elder stood in front of the assembly and said, "If we can't build this addition, this church is done for. It depends upon our ability." That church never saw their plans become reality. At our distance, the elder's lack of confidence in God becomes apparent. The same oversight in our own lives often remains hidden.

Whether it is elders saying, "We can't do it," or people in the pew concluding, "I'm not good enough," or leaders making plans by sight or Christians denying God by how they live life, we sometimes forget that God lives.

We sense these restrictions in our outlook toward the lost and the poor. "Why should I invite anybody to church? They won't come"; "Why should I help the poor? It's a bottomless pit"; "Why should I help them with their problems? They'll divorce"; "Why should we send a team to Africa? The Communists have overrun the place." Discouraged Christians stop working because they feel they labor alone.

Leon Sanderson gathered together evidence that reminds us that God works with or without our approval or awareness. In the past twenty-four hours, your heart beat 104,000 times. Your blood traveled 168,000,000 miles. You inhaled 440 cubic feet of air. You ate 3.25 pounds of food, drank three quarts of liquid, spoke 4,800 words, moved 750 muscles, grew .000046 inch of fingernail and .002 inch of hair, and exercised 7,000,000 brain cells. None if it was under your control. God has power we never see or understand.

Civilla D. Martin understood God's providence in the Joseph story better than most when she wrote these lines:

Be not dismayed, whate'er betide,  
God will take care of you.  
Beneath his wings of love abide,  
God will take care of you.

Through days of toil when heart doth fail,  
God will take care of you.  
When dangers fierce your path assail,



God will take care of you.  
 All you may need he will provide,  
 God will take care of you.  
 Nothing you ask will be denied,  
 God will take care of you.  
 No matter what may be the test,  
 God will take care of you.  
 Lean, weary one, upon his breast,  
 God will take care of you.

### SURPRISING PROVIDENCE

Sometimes God does not work in the ways we anticipate. As a result, we conclude he is not there. We identify with Joseph. He got the nice new coat, had the fresh, positive dreams, and the horizons looked great. He probably had great SAT scores and letters from the best colleges. "University of Jerusalem, here I come!"

But instead of college, he got a pit. Instead of being hired by a Fortune 500 firm, he heard the prison door slam. Life disappointed him. How could God be involved in such a bad turn of events? Surely God wants for me what I want. But the story tells otherwise.

When Potiphar went to the employment agency to get an overseer for his business, he did not have a teenager from Palestine in mind. But soon that youngster was in charge of everything on his spread except his bed. When the warden cast around for a right-hand man to deal with the overcrowding in the prison, he was not looking for an accused rapist. When Pharaoh needed a man to carry out the plan that emerged from his midnight dreams, he was not looking for the head maintenance man from the local prison. When the growl in the brothers' stomachs got so loud that they mounted their camels bound for Egypt, they were not expecting to buy food from their long lost brother. As Jacob sat within the borders of the promised land contemplating his own death, he was not expecting to die in the best pastureland of Egypt.

A power behind the dreamer in this story brings a twist to life: selling the dreamer as a slave to get him next to the throne; dreams in Pharaoh's mansion that can only be understood by an unshaven man in the prison dungeon; hunger pains in Palestine that can only be satisfied by Egyptian grain distributed by Hebrew hands.

But God loves surprises. The Bible is full of them. God makes a slow, two-legged creature with a thin skin and no fur king over the animals. He puts no fence around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A farmer builds a boat that reeks, but does not leak. Abraham and his barren wife write a book on fertility.

Moses, a man held captive by his own past, is told to lead a freedom march. A dirty, red-haired boy in the back pasture hears the word, "David, you're the next king." Jeremiah shakes his head no, but says yes when God needs a prophet. Saul made straight A's in a course on you-only-get-what-you-work-for, but becomes Paul, the world's leading writer on how the best things in life are free. A baby born in a stable to a couple nobody had ever heard of becomes the voice of God on earth.

That bothers us about this God. He comes with such surprises, with uncanny twists. He still surprises.

We wondered where we will get the money, the power to take the gospel to the world, and God opens Eastern Europe. Suddenly our preachers are lecturing in great universities in the Soviet Union, and our teenagers are handing out tracts in Red Square.

We saw thirty years of welfare fail the people in the ghettos of our cities. Suddenly we are reminded that a great man once said of God, "He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." Then the director of the public housing authority in the poorest city in America says, "The problem in the inner city is spiritual." He tells us, "Any room you want is yours."

We wondered, "Is there anyone interested in the gospel?" Then "Herald of Truth" ran six ads offering a free Bible. God grants 65,000 responses.

A mission team in Kenya was discouraged that only four hundred people came to know Christ in 1988. They decide to



spend all of January 1989 in prayer. Disease forces one family stateside. Illness keeps several in bed for weeks. They cut back on preaching opportunities. At the end of the year, they looked at God's work: thirteen hundred people baptized into Christ and dozens of new churches were started.

The Dallas inner-city ministry lost its little yellow building due to highway construction. The director saw a perfectly situated 5500-square-foot facility for sale. The owner wanted half a million dollars. The ministry could not afford to buy or rent it. A week later the owner called to say, "I've been thinking about it, and I'm going to give you the building."

Missionaries fretted because the Muslims held northern Nigeria. In October 1990, twelve Americans helped the national evangelists in that area with a campaign. During the two weeks, they baptized 519 people, including the King and Queen of Egbe and their eleven-member family.

Five years ago, people in Nashville, Tennessee, bemoaned the sad plight of the black housing projects. Drugs were rampant. Somebody started Inner City Nashville church of Christ, and today a church of four hundred meets there. They converted the number one drug dealer in town. The preacher's wife can walk in any back alley of downtown Nashville because that church is so widely respected on the street.

Thirty-five years ago, soon after Harvey and Sue Porter graduated from Abilene Christian University, they with thirty other people started a new church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Today, the Montgomery Avenue church of Christ boasts twelve hundred members, five full-time staff members, and a successful new church plant in Pecos, New Mexico. Every missionary ever supported by churches of Christ in the small African country of Swaziland came from that one church. They have trained over one hundred preachers in that nation and started nearly fifty congregations.

Homeless people took over the inner city of Houston. Four years ago, someone had a better idea. Now the Impact church of Christ has three hundred homeless people attending two different services.

A missionary to Papua, New Guinea, wondered if God

answered his prayers. He started to keep track. He wrote down every prayer request. He pasted a picture in his prayer journal of every person he prayed for. He checked and rechecked. At last report, God was good for sixteen thousand requests.

A preacher's wife in the upper Midwest was discouraged. Every person she tried to influence for Christ moved, grew disinterested, or died. She wondered if God worked. In the last five years, that preacher's wife has led twenty-five people to Christ.

A Memphis secretary trusted God with her life. She tried hard to get a good job in another department of her firm, but she was turned down. She took a position with another organization. Two years later, the first company moved out of town.

I am always amazed that after fretting for months about how to open the heart of a family who lives in the fast lane or a neighbor who is headlong in a pursuit of materialism or a relative who has plunged into the lake of immorality, God suddenly opens a heart and fulfills a dream.

God provides. Just as he worked in Joseph's life, he works in yours. Whether we admit it or not, whether we celebrate it or not, whether we talk about it or not, God works.

The text reminds us that God directs the world, but not as we expected, not the way we have always done it. He does what he does.

When we hear that we are supposed to have many descendants and yet our wives are barren, when a young boy thinks about becoming a pre-eminent sheaf while sitting in prison, when a man recalls the promise of the sun, moon, and stars bowing down just as the boss's wife cries rape, it is hard to see how things will work out.

But there is a God with a twinkle in his eye, full of surprises, filled with providence, watching over them and over us. The people who walked by the man named Cain and saw a mark on his head and the folks who lived thirty years this side of the flood and felt the soggy ground, they knew. They knew about the surprising ways of God.



### PRIDE AND PROVIDENCE

Could we be as blind as the brothers, missing the whole point of thirteen years of history and thirteen chapters of the Bible? Could we be like the young Joseph, perhaps only catching a glimpse of God's working? Do we in the churches of Christ believe in providence? Do we believe that God was with Joseph? Do we believe God is with us? Do we believe that God took the evil done by the sons of Jacob and brought good out of it? Do we believe that God is taking evil done in the world today, perhaps evil done by some of us, and bringing good out of it? Do we believe in the sovereign hand of God?

Sometimes we believe that we are in control. We miss God in life. We assume we do all the work. Like the older brothers who think Joseph is God, we think that the end to poverty depends on us, that we must convince the world to be saved. We conclude that we must break our own bad habits, that the elders are responsible for our churches, that the preacher must single-handedly feed the flock. It is easy to think that unless we get it all right all by ourselves, we will miss that last train heading out for heaven.

George Arliss played the role of a wealthy musician in the film *The Man Who Played God*. His slow loss of hearing brought his musical career to an end. As a result, he became increasingly bitter and cynical about both friends and God. Finally, he moved to a penthouse, mastered the art of lip-reading, and began to watch people with a set of high-powered binoculars. One day he watched a young man whose lips were moving in prayer. He learned what the man was praying for, called his butler, and had it delivered. Another day, he watched two women talk. One woman desperately needed something. The musician met the need. All the while, the cynical man in the penthouse suite laughed at God, knowing that God did not answer those prayers. He did.

From our penthouse of materialism, from the bird's-eye view at our successful jobs, from the lofty heights of our suburban lifestyles, we may think we move all the pieces on the checkerboard. But if we listen closely, we hear another player. If we watch carefully, we see another hand.

An old legend from India tells of a huge elephant and a tiny mouse who became friends. One day, they crossed over a long suspension bridge over a deep gully. As they reached the other side, the little mouse said, "Wow! We sure did make that old bridge shake!"

Mouse-like pride drowns out providence, making our lightweight efforts responsible for his backstage power.

### RESPONDING TO PROVIDENCE

The Joseph story reminds us about the missing dimension in many modern lives. How do we respond? Two things come to mind.

#### *Watch and Listen*

Irina Ratushinskaya grew up an atheist in Russia. She became a poet and spent several years in Siberia for her protest against the communists. In a recent interview, they asked her how she came to believe in God. With no Bible, no church, no Christian parents, why did she become a believer? She said, "I realized that when adults tell you there are no gremlins, they tell you once, and that's it. But my teachers told us over and over again that there was no god. Because they felt they had to keep telling us, I knew he must exist."<sup>10</sup>

Meister Eckhart said in effect, "God is like a person who clears his throat while hiding and so gives himself away."<sup>11</sup> That is the Joseph story. The brothers never hear him clear his throat. Only Joseph hears. Regardless of who stands in the spotlight, regardless of who gets top billing, another power backstage has the final say.

On Christmas Day 1989, the Soviets allowed an American to preach to 200,000,000 Soviet citizens on television. He talked about God. Afterwards, one of the men who gave the American permission to speak approached him backstage. "Very good. But what if there is no God?" The preacher said, "Oh, but there is and you have experienced him. You just don't know it. He's in your thoughts. He's in your life, but you haven't recognized him." The man's eyes grew large. Tears started to flow. He reached out and hugged the preacher.<sup>12</sup>



Watch and listen!

### *Celebrate and Share*

First we must watch and listen for God's work. Second, when we see it we need to celebrate and share it. When my youngest son was three years old, he discussed God with me. He told me God watches over us and helps us. I asked him, "How has God helped you?" He said God was in heaven watching him. I asked, "How can God watch you from heaven?" He thought a moment, then said, "God is in my stomach watching me." We might not put him in our stomachs, but we can tell what he has done in our lives, through our hands, with our feet, in our hearts. Acts 14:27 tells us that the early church gathered together to tell each other what God had done. We ought to do the same.

Frederick Buechner relates a personal story about eating lunch with two students on a Christian college campus. They talked about the weather and the movies. The one student, as naturally as he would ask the time of day, inquired, "What is God doing in your life?" They went on to discuss it. Buechner was astounded because Americans do not talk that way. If we believe God cares for us, we leave it unsaid. The sky would fall if most people confessed, "God did this for me."<sup>13</sup>

Our individual and corporate lives must sing of God's work among us. Our prayers must cite his powerful ways. Our conversations must recall his deeds. Our homes must testify to his providence. We must celebrate and share God's work among us.

### **BLIND TO THE WORLD, ALIVE TO GOD**

Several years ago, my wife, Sally, and I studied with a young girl named Renee. After a hard life, she finally turned her future toward God. But during the studies she told Sally three things about her dad. He was a successful lawyer. He was extremely good-looking. He was blind. Then Renee said something surprising. She said she was glad her father was blind. She explained that her father loved her mother very much, but her mother was plain and homely. Renee said, "If my father

could see himself and then see his wife and compare her with all the other beautiful women, I'm afraid he might not love my mother as he does. Because he is blind, he only sees and loves her heart."

May God blind us to this world, so that we can see the amazing, wonderful heart and work of God!

### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Cited by David Veerman, "Sermons: Apply Within," *Leadership* 11 (Spring 1990), 120-21.

<sup>2</sup>James S. Woodroof and O. John Payne, *Struggles of the Kingdom* (Searcy, Ark.: Woodroof & Payne, 1975), 33-34.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce Thielemann, "Sermons for Head and Heart," *Leadership* 8 (Spring 1989), 60.

<sup>4</sup>Win Arn, *How to Diagnose and Renew Your Church* (Monrovia, Calif.: Church Growth, 1991), 5.

<sup>5</sup>Mac Lynn, *Churches of Christ in the United States* (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Co., 1991), xv-xviii.

<sup>6</sup>All Bible quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

<sup>7</sup>William Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 17-39.

<sup>8</sup>Bernard Champigneulle, *Rodin* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1967), 262-64.

<sup>9</sup>Lloyd Cline Sears, *The Eyes of Jehovah: The Life and Faith of James A. Harding* (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Co., 1970), 42-43.

<sup>10</sup>Ellen Santilli Vaughn, "In Solitary Cells on Winter Nights," *Christianity Today*, 15 December 1989, 28.

<sup>11</sup>Ralph L. Woods, ed., *The World Treasury of Religious Quotations* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1966), 369.

<sup>12</sup>Cited by Michael Novak, "The Revolution that Wasn't," *Christianity Today*, 23 April 1990, 20.

<sup>13</sup>Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991). Excerpted in *Christianity Today*, 11 February 1991, 63.

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**PREACHING  
AND  
GENESIS**

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## EXPOSITORY PREACHING FROM GENESIS

Jimmy Adcox

The past several years have brought a refreshing revitalization of interest in expository preaching. Preachers are talking about it, affirming its value, and are making increasing attempts to do it. Although our attempts are laudable, frequently our efforts fall short of true exegetical and expository process. This may be true of all our efforts at biblical preaching, but it seems to be especially true of preaching from the Old Testament. We praise the idea of expository preaching because it shows respect for the Word and seems to be a true effort at "back to the Bible" preaching, but too often we begin with a text, look for an apparent moral or lesson, and present it to the audience without regard to the central theological intent of the writer. It is not that we wish to bypass that intent; it is simply that we have not been aware of the need to identify it and bring it to life in the lives of the people in the pew.

Expository preaching when properly done has several advantages. Stott lists four main benefits: (1) It sets limits. It restricts us to the text and does not allow us to invent our own meanings. (2) It demands integrity by confronting the preacher repeatedly with the question, "What did the original author intend his words to mean?" (3) It identifies the pitfalls to be avoided. Stott especially mentions forgetfulness and disloyalty. "The forgetful expositor loses sight of his text by going off at a tangent and following his own fancy. The disloyal expositor appears to remain with his text, but strains and stretches it into something quite different from its original and natural meaning." (4) It gives us confidence to preach because we are not expounding our own fallible views, but the Word of God.<sup>1</sup>



But there are also advantages for the church. First, expository preaching helps guarantee that the Scriptures are heard as they were intended. People do not just hear something about the Scriptures. They hear the Word of God applied consistently with the original intent and meaning of the writer. Second, expository preaching models for the church the proper use of Scripture. It helps provide a way for the church to assess whether or not the message really is from God. Third, it helps provide a balanced diet, protecting the church from the narrow interests or biased perspectives of a speaker who otherwise might use his sermons as a jumping off place to discuss whatever happened to be on his mind. And fourth, such preaching helps the church keep its focus on the theological issues that are central. Such theological focus can help a church avoid a host of contemporary theological fads and a host of sectarian issues that result in distraction, or even worse, division.

Before we look at expository preaching as it relates specifically to Genesis, we will first look at what is involved in biblical preaching in general and in preaching from the Old Testament in particular.

### BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

John Bright defines biblical preaching as "the exposition of a biblical text or of some segment of the Bible's teaching, and the proclamation of that as normative for Christian faith and practice."<sup>2</sup> Inherent in the idea of biblical preaching is a respect for the authority of the Scriptures, i.e., a belief that properly understood and interpreted, the Scriptures are intended to reveal to us a message from God that is applicable for us today. But that leaves us with a tremendous challenge. How can we properly understand and interpret the Scriptures in the context of its own day, much less make application to a very different context in which we live today?

We must begin with an exegesis of the text itself. Exegesis must be true to the nature of Scripture. Since the text is presented in the context of a specific setting and time (history)

and in written form (literature), a proper understanding of the text must involve both historical and literary analysis.

Historical analysis involves discovering the meaning of the text in its own historical-cultural context. Historical questions concerning the author, the original audience, the time, the setting, and purpose of writing are important considerations. They will provide important clues to the purpose and meaning of the writing. The desire is to be able to hear the passage in the same way that the original hearers would have heard it. To do this, we must have some understanding of the times, concerns, people, customs, practices, etc., that were characteristic of that day and time.

Historical analysis must begin with the book itself, then with other biblical material in which inspired writers shed some light on how the material should be regarded. After careful analysis for the purpose of surfacing clues and insights about the occasion and setting of the writing, the exegete can then utilize other sources to give added insight from historical information about the times of the book. Historical analysis of the book itself will provide you with information by which to measure the accuracy and legitimacy of such external sources.

Literary analysis is concerned with the literary nature of the book. Again the exegete begins by seeing the book as a whole to gain a sweeping view of the overall content and nature of the book. At this point one desires to see the big picture. This is important because every section or scene that makes up the whole must be interpreted in light of the whole. As an appreciation of the content and method of the writer unfolds, one begins to observe something of the structure and component parts of the book. One is also able to see the various genres and literary forms utilized by the writer and is able to discern how those forms are used and how they affect a proper interpretation of each text. Grammatical analysis of each text then becomes important within this larger context.

In the case of Genesis, it becomes clear that narrative is the predominant genre. Haddon Robinson notes well the difference between interpreting narrative and some other forms of literature. "When working in narrative literature, an expositor



will seldom have to work through a maze of complex grammatical relationships, but instead will have to derive the author's meaning from the broad study of many paragraphs."<sup>3</sup>

It is much more important, for example, to understand narrative in its literary context than it is for wisdom literature which has a greater tendency to stand alone. The expository preacher must be careful not to isolate narratives from their overall literary context and preach the story as if it had nothing to do with the overall purpose and method of the writer.<sup>4</sup>

While not every preacher has readily available to himself all the skills and tools necessary for exacting exegesis, it must be the serious preacher's determination to begin all preaching with as thorough an exegesis of the text as possible. The Scriptures must never be just a jumping off place for our own reflections or moralisms. It is God's Word we are most concerned to present.

### THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

Biblical preaching must not only be based on the exegesis that brings out the precise verbal meanings of the text. It also involves what John Bright calls theological exegesis. He defines it as: "an exegesis of the text in theological depth, an exegesis that is not content merely to bring out the precise verbal meaning of the text but that goes on to lay bare the theology that informs the text."<sup>5</sup> Bright continues:

It is an exegesis that seeks to discover not merely *what* the ancient law required but also the theology expressed in the law; not merely *what* abuses Amos attacked but the theology that caused him so to attack them; not merely *what* directives Paul gave to this or that church but the theology that moved him to give them. All biblical texts are expressive of theology in that all are animated, if at times indirectly, by some theological concern. It is incumbent upon the interpreter to seek to discover what that theological concern is. To do this is no violation of sound exegetical principles. Rather, it is the completion of the exegetical task.<sup>6</sup>

The preacher should not enter the pulpit merely to explain the verbal meaning of an ancient text from which he chooses to draw random lessons. If he is to present the Word in a way that speaks to the lives of the congregation, he must understand not only what the text says, but the concerns that caused it to be said and to be said as it was. The things verbally said by the text may be appropriate to the original audience in their unique circumstance, but the theological concerns behind them should be of concern to us and to every generation.<sup>7</sup> In fact, certain parts of the Bible are practically irrelevant to us apart from the theological intent behind them, for it is only through such theology that they may speak to us at all.<sup>8</sup>

Much of theological interpretation goes back to the intent. What was the intent of the writer? Why is this text in the book? What is the purpose behind it? How does it contribute to the whole? It is a violation of honest biblical study to use a text to prove a point that does not grow out of the intent of the inspired writing. We do not have the liberty to preach lessons from texts that appear good and valid to us, but which were not a part of the writer's intent. Such preaching may contain some good moral lessons, but it is not biblical preaching. Biblical preaching is concerned about the theology that informs the text.

### CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

One must not only understand the original meaning of the text and the theological concerns behind it, but one must also discern the life situation of the audience to be addressed. Only then can the preacher know the points of application where these theological concerns should find expression for them.

It is at this point that preaching impacts human lives. An audience may not be changed by encountering the precise verbal meanings of an ancient text. Nor will they gain much from abstract theological principles disconnected from life. But if they can see the purpose and work of God in the lives of ancient people and feel the impact of God and his purpose alive in their own time and place, then the power of God can be



unleashed in their lives today. Bright has written,

Each sermon thus becomes at once a theological and psychological exercise (what someone has called an exegesis both of the text and the congregation), which seeks to present the text in such a way that the modern hearer knows himself to be addressed by it and involved in it.<sup>9</sup>

## PREACHING FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

The challenge of preaching the Old Testament is twofold. It is the challenge of preaching the Old Testament text in the light of the New Testament without leaving the central message of the Old Testament text behind and running completely into the New. After all, the Old Testament contains authority as the Word of God itself. And yet its message is brought to its fullness only in the light of God's work in Christ. Since we are Christians and live with a focus on Christ and the gospel, every sermon must be preached as a Christian sermon. And yet the Old Testament, while containing the promise and preparation of Jesus, is not addressed directly either by Christians or to Christians. It presents the challenge of taking a pre-Christian message and preaching it in a Christian way without compromising the integrity of the Old Testament in its original context.

So preaching from the Old Testament involves an additional step in the process of expository preaching. The student must bring his biblical and theological exegesis to the New Testament for a verdict. What has the New Testament done with this aspect of Old Testament teaching in light of Christ? Does it ratify it? Modify it? Give it new significance? Pass judgment on it? Or what? It is not that one jumps from the Old Testament text into preaching a New Testament sermon. Rather it is that one preaches the Old Testament text itself in its plain meaning, but in the light of what its theology has become in Christ.<sup>10</sup>

## PREACHING FROM GENESIS

In preaching from any Hebrew narrative it is important that

the text chosen should be a complete unit. While this is important in all areas of Scripture, it is especially important for narrative sections. This is important because we are especially susceptible to isolating a detail from the narrative that seems to fit a certain preaching occasion. When this happens we are being untrue to the function and theology of the text. This does not mean that we cannot highlight a central text in a narrative, so long as it is preached and presented consistent with its setting and use in the overall narrative. Properly setting the textual unit is an important part of the exegetical process and helps guarantee a proper use of the text in preaching.<sup>11</sup>

Theme formulation is also critical. The theme can be envisioned as the unifying thought of the text or in narrative texts as the conceptualizing of the plot. Since narrative texts are intended to be viewed as a whole, identifying the central theme will assist the preacher in maintaining a unified message rather than breaking the message down in disconnected segments that overlook the central purpose of the text.

Since Genesis is predominantly narrative, it would seem that a narrative style of preaching would be the most likely form of the sermon. The inspired writers utilized narrative forms to accomplish their purpose for a reason. Since the power of the message is to a large degree found in its form, it is advisable that the preacher use narrative preaching in an effort to recreate for the hearer the same impact that the Genesis narratives would have held for their original audience.

This does not mean that the sermon should merely be a repeating of the story without additional comment or instruction. Nor does it mean that the meaning should remain obscurely couched in a story from which the listener remains disconnected and distant. Rather, the preacher seeks to make the biblical text come alive by familiarizing the listener with the issues and life situations of the characters and/or the audience and how the theology of the text had such a powerful impact on their lives. One might also choose to create identity with the theological point by using a story from modern life or experience in which a similar impact or response is felt as that which must have been experienced by the original audience. The



objective is to allow the sermon to do for your audience in a Christian setting what the text must have done for its audience in its original setting. As Greidanus has written,

For establishing the relevance of a narrative passage, the major point of comparison ought to be sought not between characters in the text and people today but between the people addressed by the author and the people addressed by the preacher today.<sup>12</sup>

It should be remembered in preaching from Genesis that the major purposes of the narrative are God-centered. Fee and Stewart have written the following: "Their purpose is to show God at work in His creation and among His people. The narratives glorify Him, help us to understand and appreciate Him, and give us a picture of His providence and protection."<sup>13</sup> Yet there is a natural tendency for us to make the characters the central figures in the sermon. We tend to preach about the characters and assume that they are there to provide lessons for us on a variety of spiritual and moral issues. They are important ingredients in the narratives, but they should be used by us as they were used by the biblical writer, i.e., to show how God was at work among people in real flesh and blood situations to accomplish his purposes.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 126-33.

<sup>2</sup>John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967), 1963.

<sup>3</sup>Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980), 69.

<sup>4</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 213. This book provides an excellent overall balance of material on literary and historical analysis as well as relevant information on preaching Hebrew narratives.

<sup>5</sup>Bright, 170.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Bright, 173, for an example from Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 8. The message for us is not to "eat no meat offered to idols."

We are not even tempted to do so. But the theological concern behind Paul's instruction to them is most relevant to us, i.e., "indulge in no practice or habit that may cause damage to the faith of some weaker brother for whom Christ died."

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 182-212.

<sup>11</sup>Greidanus, 221-22.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 226.

<sup>13</sup>Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 74.

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## PREACHING ON THEMES FROM GENESIS

C. Philip Slate

The determination to preach the message of Genesis forces the Christian preacher to grapple with no less than four concerns, each of which has a bearing on the preaching task.

1. *First book.* Books that stand first in a series do not always have foundational purposes. Matthew is the first New Testament book, but it is not more foundational for the balance of the New Testament than Mark or Luke. That cannot be said about Genesis however. Genesis is foundational for the balance of the Bible because of its subject matter. This should call attention to the bigness of the thought with which any reader, preacher, or teacher of Genesis is dealing. It introduces an enormous number of people and concepts which make their appearance throughout the rest of Scripture. That makes preaching on Genesis very important (this will become clearer at a later point).

2. *Size.* With fifty chapters and fifty to sixty-five pages in various Bibles, Genesis is comparatively large as a book. How can one preach a book that large? Unless a church is used to it, it is unlikely a preacher could get by with preaching through the book a chapter at a time, much less a paragraph at a time! But if one is selective in preaching, what form should that selectivity take so it does not damage the whole story of Genesis? I intend to show how that may be done by preaching major themes in Genesis.

3. *Old Testament.* Any time a Christian attempts to preach authoritatively from the Old Testament, he must decide the lines along which he is going to do it with legitimacy. It is one thing to explain an Old Testament incident or teaching, but it is

another thing to preach it so as to make applications, to urge upon the hearers a mode of behavior based on that passage. The results of binding on Christians obsolete parts of the Old Testament are "spiritual adultery" (Rom. 7:1-6; cf. Heb. 9:11-10:20) or a forfeiture of grace (Gal. 5:1-12). But New Testament writers affirm the strong place of what we call the Old Testament in the life of the church (Rom. 15:3-6; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17); it was the Bible of the early church. Genesis is a case in point; it is quoted or referred to in various connections in eighteen of the twenty-seven New Testament books.

The authoritative Christian use of Genesis will certainly involve introduction of concepts and people who are given prominent treatment in the New Testament. Jesus indicated the correct view of marriage is rooted in Genesis 2 (Mt. 19:1-6), while Paul argued that the faith by which one embraces Jesus is the same kind of faith that Abraham had (Rom. 4:1-6, 16-25). The writer of Hebrews makes much the same use of eight characters in Genesis (Heb. 11:4-22). Several important doctrines or concepts are introduced in Genesis and then run through the rest of Scripture like mighty streams of water: creation, marriage, sin, election, punishment, faith, human nature, etc. Nothing about covenant changes makes unnecessary or obsolete the Genesis background for these doctrines. They are critically important for Christian purposes.

In some cases God's subsequent actions have changed his expectations of people, as with covenants, sacrifices, and terms of worship. In all cases where a teacher or preacher endeavors to *apply* Genesis to Christians, one should seek a New Testament update on that teaching. That is, one must check what use the New Testament writers make of the particular doctrine. A useful way of doing that is to check one of several tables of the New Testament use of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, one should be very familiar with the overall thrust and emphasis of both Genesis and the New Testament as one seeks to understand the Christian update. This is to be done both to avoid misapplication of Genesis and to make appropriate points for Christians.

4. *Narrative-Biography:* Most of Genesis consists of narra-



tives or story forms. Indeed, "three-quarters of the book are mainly concerned with the lives of three men: Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph."<sup>2</sup> But the whole book is so composed that the big points are presented by reporting the actions of both God and people. Thus, to preach Genesis one must learn to handle narrative materials. But how does one detect the real point the author of a narrative is making? If that point is not known, how can one be confident one is preaching what Scripture intended? Furthermore, does narrative/"story" form suggest anything about sermon structure?

Several things are available for the preacher or teacher to use along this line. Fee and Stuart provide a thoughtful but popular treatment of Old Testament narratives.<sup>3</sup> They show the characteristics of narrative material and how to get the main points the author is making. Particularly helpful is their view of the three levels at which one should look at narratives. A more thoughtful and homiletically helpful work is Sydney Greidanus' *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*.<sup>4</sup> His chapter 9 is excellent on understanding and preaching from narrative materials. The concept of narrative-shaped sermons is found in Wardlaw's *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture*.<sup>5</sup> A useful critique for those who go overboard with narrative preaching may be seen in Eslinger's *A New Hearing*, especially chapters 2 and 3.<sup>6</sup> As an example of a narrative-shaped sermon by a member of the church of Christ is J. W. McGarvey's 1893 sermon, "Divine Providence: Joseph."<sup>7</sup> He begins at the end of Joseph's life, asks three questions, and then, interestingly, tells the story backward to make his point. It is a useful case study. But the big point is not whether we can retell Genesis stories, forward or backward, but whether we will be making the point(s) the author intended. (More on this later.) Since Genesis is formed by narrative material, it is extremely important to learn both to interpret and formulate sermons from that type of material.

*Preaching Themes:* Preaching the themes of Genesis consists of (a) selecting major ideas or motifs which figure prominently in the book, (b) explaining their meaning, and (c) applying those themes fairly to the hearers. Preaching themes is a species

of expository preaching since one's sermons are carved directly from the text, but in theme preaching one's material may be drawn from several texts in the same book. McGarvey's sermon ranged over several chapters but sought to deal with God's providence in Joseph's life. But Joseph is not the only case of divine providence in the book of Genesis. Thus one might use several cases of God's providence displayed in Genesis and present them in one sermon. Similarly, throughout the book of Genesis one finds a number of demonstrations of faith.

A consoling feature of preaching themes from a book is that one is thereby most likely preaching what the author intended. Donald G. Miller insisted that for an expository sermon, one which claims to expound Scripture, "The purpose of the sermon should be the same as the purpose of the scripture on which it is based."<sup>8</sup> That definition may be a little strict; I would slightly alter it to read that one's purpose should be consistent with or a legitimate extension of the biblical writer's purpose. But if one can discern the true themes of a biblical book and preach on them, one thereby stands a chance to preach what is close to God's heart since Scripture is his Word and designed to serve his purposes. I shall attempt to highlight several of the themes in Genesis to show how this is done.

As long as one merely explains the meaning of the Genesis text, or even the entire book, and does not show the significance of the material for modern hearers, one is lecturing, not preaching. The sermonic necessity of "making application"<sup>9</sup> does not mean that the preacher-teacher spoonfeeds the hearers (he may lead *them*) to make application as if they are to get no points except those he makes. People are capable of thinking, and, joyfully, they will often take an explained text and make their own applications of it. The function of application, then, is often to prod the hearers to make some of their own and to internalize the Word of God.

Somehow it seems inappropriate to attempt proclamation of themes without putting them in the context of the whole book. Obviously, the preacher-teacher cannot accurately discern the themes unless their place in the structure and thrust of the book is detected. But the hearers are also entitled to some overview



of the whole book. If one plans to preach a series of sermons on Genesis, it seems wise for one sermon to be presented to give an overall picture of that marvelous book.

I will elaborate two themes to show the lines along which theme sermons may develop, and then I will simply identify additional themes in Genesis and suggest applications. Fee and Stuart have pointed out that in narrative materials God is ordinarily the "hero."<sup>10</sup> That is certainly true in Genesis where a major purpose is to show the nature of the "true and living God."

1. *God.* Genesis contains a large amount of varied materials on the identity and nature of God.<sup>11</sup> The God who called Abram (Gen. 12:1) is presented as the *only* God, in the true sense of that word. In Genesis one finds references to other "gods" only in the Jacob-Laban narrative where the images of the household gods are mentioned (Gen. 31:19, 30, 34; 35:4). One of the great doctrines of the whole Bible, which finds expression even in the last book (Rev. 4:11), is God's creatorship. He created "the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1) and provided the plant and animal inhabitants of the earth (Gen. 1:11-25), including people who are made in his image (Gen. 1:26, 27; 9:6). Both Melchizedek (Gen. 14:19) and Abram (Gen. 14:22) called him "maker of heaven and earth," a refrain noted in the Psalms and essentially stated by Paul to the Athenians (Acts 17:24). God is thus not to be confused with his creation.

From the beginning, God is presented as One who speaks (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 28, 29; 2:16, 17; 3:8-19; etc.) and knows (Gen. 3:8-13). He had "sorrow" and "grief" (Gen. 6:6) as well as favor (Gen. 6:8). Although he is "the Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25) who defeats evil people (Gen. 14:19) and makes events happen (Gen. 15:14, 16; 25:23; 45:5-8), he is never a mere force; God is always a "he" or a "thou," but never an "it."

*Preaching:* The information above is only a part of the "God information" in Genesis and needs to be studied in context both to insure accurate interpretation and to make decisions about sermon structure. The theme sermon may be dealt with in a topical or biographical format. Genesis 3 records a series of episodes which involve God, the serpent, Adam, and Eve. The

story, as a story, contains important information about human nature, sin, the tempter, and God.<sup>12</sup> Thus, one may choose to use this story/narrative form to discuss God's nature as personal, moral, judging, and concerned for people. One could go outside the chapter to show how God is described the same way throughout Genesis.

*Significance/ Application:*<sup>13</sup> Oral discussion of Scripture is not a sermon unless application is made. The Genesis information about the nature of God is as desperately needed today as it was in the time of Moses and Paul when people believed in many gods but not in "a true and living God" (1 Thess. 1:9, 10). The tendency to confuse the creature/creation with the Creator has been common in human history (cf. Rom. 1:24, 25). There is a reason why J. B. Phillips' little 1952 book, *Your God Is Too Small*, still available, was already in its seventh edition by 1954.<sup>14</sup> People who claim to be Christian should not be surprised at their lack of joyful service for and prayer to God as long as they see him as a resident policeman, a grand old man, confined to a box—or perhaps not even a "he" at all, but something like "an oblong blur." The New Age movement, for all its pretenses to be the religion for a modern era, is quaintly like religions of the past, especially Pantheism. Through it one may expect some kind of divine answer, but it is likely to come, to use Bob Dillon's words, "In the blowing of the wind." In the spring of 1991, Ziggy was pictured in the Sunday comics as standing at the edge of a beautiful valley with its verdant trees and a rainbow overhead. With outstretched arms Ziggy says, "Mom, I am home." I am not sure whether Ziggy was mocking the concept or embracing it. But one gets the impression a female god is addressed, one who may not be so much a power behind nature as identical with it. The New Age movement is attempting to get its views on television. Thus, both unbelievers and weak Christians alike have need of the Genesis presentations about God. A better understanding of God can influence behavior, as it did in the case of Joseph, and enhance one's worship. Interestingly, the affirmation that God "Didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created" (Rev. 4:11) is used as the basis for worshipping him, to set the mood



for worship. If one wishes to sing "How Great Thou Art" with greater meaning, then the concept needs to be biblically informed precisely with the kind of information one reads in Genesis. But there are other concepts of God presented in Genesis which may have equally significant application for a contemporary congregation:

*Other Concepts About God:*

A. The names of God reveal several of his attributes or characteristics. He is Almighty (Gen. 17:1), Most High (Gen. 14:18-22), and Everlasting (Gen. 21:33). Hagar called him "a God of seeing" (or "sight," "appearance") (Gen. 16:13) because God's angel had appeared to her. He is God of Beth-el (Gen. 35:7), God of Israel (Gen. 33:20), and the Mighty One of Jacob (Gen. 49:24).

B. Although God is Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25) who will not always put up with the sinfulness of his creatures (cf. Gen. 3:22-24; 6:1-7), his judgment is restrained by his kindness and mercy (Gen. 4:15; 6:8, 11-18; 8:1-4; 9:8-17; 18:15, 16, 21; etc.). See the next section on this point.

C. Although the analysis may not be original with him, Willis calls attention to a pattern found in four well-known stories in Genesis 1 to 11. The sin of Adam and Eve (chap. 3), Cain's murder of Abel (chap. 4), Noah and the flood (chaps. 6-9), and the city and tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) present important doctrinal themes through the repeated pattern of (a) people's sinning, (b) their efforts to evade responsibility, (c) God's pronouncement of curses or punishment, his judgment, and (d) God's putting mankind "in a situation in which he can begin again."<sup>15</sup> Thus, whenever people are put to the test they fail because of the basic heart problem, sin. It is bigger than a human being. God disapproves and punishes, but he creates a new hopeful situation. The bow in the sky and the promise to Abraham portray the mercy of a just God. That theme is carried throughout the rest of Scripture.

2. *Mankind: Humankind:* The qualitative difference between humanity and the other creation is made quite clear from both the failure of anything in human creation to be a suitable companion for man (Gen. 2:20), and the declaration that peo-

ple are made in God's image, after his likeness (Gen. 1:26). The point is stated elsewhere in Genesis (9:6) and other biblical books (Ps. 8:5; 82:6; 89:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; 2 Cor. 4:4; Jas. 3:9). This basic kinship to God, not shared by other earthly creations, is a foundational doctrine in Scripture.<sup>16</sup> But mankind's kinship to God (cf. Acts 17:27-29) and potential for Godlikeness are hindered through the deep-seated nature of sin.

As noted above, people as a whole fail to live up to God's expectations; but one finds even in Genesis several cases of righteousness. Enoch "walked with God" (Gen. 5:24) and Noah was a righteous man (Gen. 6:8, 9). Although he earlier "pitched his tent toward Sodom," Lot resisted some of the sins in that city (Gen. 19:7, 8; cf. 2 Pet. 2:7). Joseph exhibited a number of selfless attributes. But even in Abraham one sees the ugly effects of sinfulness as he misrepresented situations (Gen. 12:10-13; 20:1, 2).

The main thrust of Genesis, especially from chapters 12 to 50, deals with God's efforts to raise up a people through whom salvation would eventually come. At the end of the book, the moral position of mankind had not advanced very much from what one sees in chapter 3; humanity could only look at signposts pointing to a future and better time.

3. *Faith:* The New Testament writers made much of faith as the appropriate response to God, the Creator, and not infrequently they pointed to characters in Genesis as demonstrations of that faith. The writer of Hebrews used several of them as examples of how faith is to behave (Heb. 11:4-22). James uses Abraham to spur people on to active faith (Gen. 2:20-24; cf. Genesis 22), and Paul used him as a paradigm for the kind of faith by which one is justified through Jesus (Rom. 4:1-25). Learning to trust God is a major theme in Genesis, and its application carries on to the present.

4. *The Promise:* In Genesis, as elsewhere in Scripture, God is presented as a promise-making and promise-keeping God. He makes covenants (Gen. 6:18; 15:18; 17:2; etc.), which is a form of promise-making. But throughout Scripture where the words "the promise" occur, the reference is to God's choice to make of Abram a great nation and through him eventually to bless all



nations (Gen. 12:1-4; cf. Acts 7:17; 26:7; Rom. 4:13ff.; 9:6-9; Gal. 3:14-4:28; Heb. 6:13; etc.). A careful reading of the narratives about them reveals that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were nurtured and sustained by that promise. The Joseph story is a good case in point.

It may be, as J. H. Hertz has said, that "the Joseph stories touch and enthrall the human soul with their sublime simplicity," and that "they are absolutely irreplaceable in the moral and religious training of children."<sup>17</sup> If one does not see in these stories a young man who was nurtured by God's promise, given originally to Joseph's great-grandfather Abram, one fails to see the largest force in Joseph's life. In that tender scene when he reveals himself to his brothers, he told them not to be angry with themselves for what they had done since God used the event "to save lives" and "to preserve for you a remnant on earth" (Gen. 45:4-7). In fact, he said, "It was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen. 45:8). After Jacob's death, the brothers feared Joseph's vengeance, but he assured them again that while they meant it for evil, God meant it for good (Gen. 50:20). Just prior to his death, Joseph affirmed his confidence that "God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Gen. 50:24). He then made his brothers swear an oath that when (not "if") God comes to your aid, "you must carry my bones up from this place" (Gen. 50:25). Genesis ends (v. 26) with Joseph's body in a coffin ready for the journey he believed to be inevitable. He was sustained by "the promise."

McGarvey was correct in assessing Joseph's life as an exercise in God's providence. But the providence was worked out as a means of realizing his promise to Abraham. This is clearly a major theme in Genesis 12-50. For preaching purposes, people still need to hear about a promise-keeping God, "one who is faithful" (i.e., who can be depended upon) (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13). Genesis is important in its own right and thus deserves to be preached because of its foundational nature. But since it is not possible to understand the New Testament responsibly without recourse to the Old Testament, and since Genesis figures very prominently into the writings of the New Testament, a Chris-

tian preacher will do very well to proclaim the basic themes of Genesis for the edification of Christians.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>G. T. Manley, ed., *The New Bible Handbook*, 3d ed. (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1950), 442ff.; *The Greek New Testament*, 3d ed., ed. Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983), 897ff.

<sup>2</sup>Oswald T. Allis, *God Spoke By Moses: An Exposition of the Pentateuch* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1958), 8.

<sup>3</sup>Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 78-86.

<sup>4</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 188-227.

<sup>5</sup>Dan M. Wardlaw, ed., *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), chap. 5 by William J. Carl III.

<sup>6</sup>Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletic Method* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1987), chaps. 2 and 3.

<sup>7</sup>J. W. McGarvey, *Sermons* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing Co., n.d.), 215-31.

<sup>8</sup>Donald G. Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1957), 126.

<sup>9</sup>Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980), chap. 5; Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990); Herman C. Alexander, "An Analysis of the Functional Element of Application in the Expository Sermon," D.Min. thesis, Harding University Graduate School of Religion, 1990.

<sup>10</sup>Fee and Stuart, 78, #10.

<sup>11</sup>Often valuable summaries of the "religious teachings" or "theology" of a book are found in commentaries. See, for example, John T. Willis, *Genesis*, The Living Word Commentary (Abilene, Tex.: ACU Press, 1984), 49-74; Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 1, ed. D. J. Wiseman (London: Tyndale Press, 1967), 32-41.

<sup>12</sup>A Distinguished Old Testament scholar wrote an entire book on the chapter. Edward J. Young, *Genesis 3: A Devotional and Expository Study* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966).

<sup>13</sup>A very useful distinction has been made between "meaning" and "significance" in biblical studies. The "meaning" is what the author



(or back of him, the Holy Spirit) intended when the document was written in time and place. "Meaning" is singular. But "significance" has to do with application to the reader-hearer who wishes to relate biblical truth to his or her life. Applications may be multiple. See Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 51ff.

<sup>14</sup>*Your God Is Too Small*, 7th ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1954).

<sup>15</sup>Willis, 115-17.

<sup>16</sup>See D. J. A. Clines, "The Images of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53-103. A useful review of interpretation and an estimate of the concept's importance.

<sup>17</sup>J. H. Hertz, ed. *The Pentateuch and Hoftorahs*, 2d ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1966), 141. A good treatment of the religious significance of the Joseph narratives is Charles T. Fritsch, "'God was with Him': A Theological Study of the Joseph Narrative," *Interpretation* 9:1 (June 1955): 21-34.

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## BACKGROUND AND GENESIS

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## HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS: MESOPOTAMIA

Charles F. Myer, Jr.

The study of the book of Genesis has been the source of faith and the springboard of controversy.

Martin Luther in his discussion of the first Christian article of faith states: "I believe, that God created me and all creatures."

In the early part of this century the German Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch gave a series of lectures entitled "Babel und Bibel" in which he pointed out the strong presence of Babylonian material in the book of Genesis. From this he concluded that the biblical material was simply a product of massive plagiarism. While his views were extreme, it caught the attention of the scholarly world and caused more research and study to be done in the Mesopotamian area. With this new data coming in, the understanding of the background of the Genesis material became clearer. Mesopotamian themes and motifs were discovered and their similarities to the biblical material were stimulating.

The work of the archaeologist has been to provide material and intellectual data about the culture which has deepened our appreciation of the contributions the Mesopotamian milieu has made in providing a background for the book of Genesis. A major segment of this information has been retrieved from inscriptions and texts from which cultural and historical reconstructions have been made.

The scope of this lesson is to look at the various sections of the book of Genesis and then to correlate those perspectives with the Mesopotamian material which has come to light through archaeological discoveries.



From a theological perspective, the presupposition of the Bible material is simply stated, "God Is." The God of the Old Testament is totally subjective, and consequently, God is not viewed objectively by men. God is the supreme deity who is the sovereign lord of all of man's thinking, acting, and being. To study the theology of the God of Israel is to look at the deeds of God who acted in history and entered into a covenant relationship with his people. The history of Israel is written from the perspective of proclaiming the actions of a God who acts, and this *modus operandi* is begun in the first chapter of Genesis. The created world does not operate by a set of natural laws but rather by the fiat of God who not only created the world but keeps watch over the world. The ethics of the behavior of man is not presented as a paradigm of values which man has discovered and refined for himself, but his whole lifestyle revolves around the concept that "God Is" and he is at the center of every value judgment. Man has the responsibility to obey and to know that God's justice and his mercy have been revealed through his actions and deeds. While many theologians comment on the process beginning with the call of Abraham, it can also be noted that the same concept is true in the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

### THE PROLOGUE (Gen. 1:1—2:3)

The thesis of this lesson is substantiated in the first section of the book of Genesis. The author would make a division at the end of verse 3 of chapter 2 and classify this as the prologue of the book. This literary structure finds its parallel in Mesopotamian literature as well. One is impressed by the long prologue to the code of Hammurabi which is legal in content, but the opening lines are more than legislation. Alexander Heidel<sup>1</sup> has made a lucid comparison between the Mesopotamia creation story, *Enuma elish*, and the Genesis account:<sup>2</sup>

### ENUMA ELISH

Divine spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal

Primeval chaos: Ti'amat enveloped in darkness

Light emanating from the gods

The creation of the firmament

The creation of dry land

The creation of the luminaries

The creation of man

The gods rest and celebrate

### GENESIS

Divine spirit creates cosmic matter and exists independently of it

The earth a desolate waste, with darkness covering the deep

Light created

The creation of the firmament

The creation of dry land

The creation of the luminaries

The creation of man

God rests and sanctifies the seventh day

There are many conclusions which have been reached after comparing this material, but one is struck by the similarities, and one should also be impressed by the one singular dissimilarity, viz. Yahweh has created the world by his divine fiat. Many scholars have assumed the borrowing of the Mesopotamian material by the Hebrew writers; but A. T. Clay, a scholar from the University of Pennsylvania, suggested at the early part of the century that the borrowing could have gone from West to East. This view was not accepted by the scholarly community.

This opening section is a good example of how the science of ancient man often merged into his religious views. His knowledge was undergirded by his religion and his view on cosmogony and his own origins would be a reflection of this phenomenon. While the material is comparable, the points of view are incompatible for the biblical material is critical of any recognition of any God but Yahweh. It is no surprise that Yahweh creates the world by his divine command.



### THE STORY OF EDEN (Gen. 2:4-24)

The second section of the book begins with verse 4 and not 4b as some believe. The reason for this is that the book is divided into ten sections which use the Hebrew word for genealogy. For this reason the structure of the book would consist of the prologue and ten sections of the body of the book with a heading containing the Hebrew word *toledot*. (Cf. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1; and 37:2.)

The opening lines of this section, which can be literally translated "on the day when," can be compared to the opening lines of *Enuma elish*, "when upon high." In verse 6 one finds certain meteorological considerations since the phenomenon of rain had not emerged. The Hebrew word *'ed* finds its linguistic counterparts in the Mesopotamian material. There are two Sumerian loanwords which have come down into the Akkadian literature, and the sense of the word reflects a common motif in that literature. It is no surprise to find a similar idea in the biblical material.

A familiar part of this section is the story of the Garden of Eden which is associated with the four rivers. While there has been much speculation and discussion about the origin and location of the first two of the rivers, the last two are taken for granted. However, river number three has a slight identification while river number four is simply named. Apparently, everyone knew about the Euphrates.<sup>3</sup> To illustrate the speculation on the topic, some would place Pishon in India and the Gihon in Ethiopia. With this configuration, it is difficult to locate the garden east of Palestine or in Mesopotamia.

### THE FALL OF MAN (Gen. 2:25—3:24)

The third section of the book has the devastating results of man's fall from the favor of God and the punishment which came from man's act of disobedience.

There are several points which have direct parallels in the Mesopotamian material. The motifs of sexual awareness, the paradise story, and the presence of wisdom are found in var-

ious bodies of ancient literature. It is interesting to note that in the Epic of Gilgamesh these familiar motifs are found in one section of the epic. The counterpart of Gilgamesh, named Enkidu, is tempted by the courtesan, and afterwards he is rejected by his compatriots of the natural world. It is observed that "now he had wisdom" and then the female seducer tells Enkidu that "you are like a god." She then stylizes some clothes for him to indicate the arrival of a new position in life. Later in the story, Gilgamesh is unable to obtain immortality because of the role of a serpent who steals the plants of eternal life from the hero.

After man's disobedience, he is driven from the garden and his entrance back into the garden is precluded by a fiery revolving sword. The sword belongs to Yahweh, but the concept is substantiated in Mesopotamia where many of the gods had their own distinctive swords with distinguishing characteristics which help to establish their authority.

### CAIN AND ABEL (Gen. 4:1-16)

The saga of early man continues until a conflict arises between the two brothers, Cain and Abel. Sociologists view this as a reflection of tensions between the pastoral and agricultural ways of life. This conflict is focused on the way in which it influences two individuals. For our purpose, attention is drawn to the location which Cain chooses as his place of residence—"the land of Nod, east of Eden." Mesopotamia becomes the geographical point of reference.

### THE LINE OF CAIN (Gen. 4:17-26)

This short passage contains much information from a sociological and technical point of view. After Cain has changed his locale of living, he begins to continue his line of progeny. Enoch was born to Cain, and he built a city—the beginning of urbanization. This short sentence contains the gems of massive movements of people across the ages, and the biblical record informs us of its development in the area east of Eden.



Along with the founding of a city came the development of technology which allowed people to be interdependent upon each other. Within the descendents of Lamech, there was Jabal who represented the bedouin way of life, and there was Jubal who brings the concepts of esthetics into their lifestyle with the introduction of music. The phenomenon also assumes the technology which was able to produce a pipe or a lyre. For the purpose of this study, it is significant to note the parallel between these antediluvian patriarchs and the traditions from Mesopotamia about the kings who ruled before the deluge. This geneological information is found in a list of kings who ruled in ancient Sumer.<sup>4</sup>

It is also interesting to note that the name Methusael is a good Akkadian name which would be written *mutu-sa-ili*—"Man of God."

### THE PATRIARCHS BEFORE THE FLOOD (Gen. 5:1-32)

From a structural point of view, this section begins the second of the ten sections of the *toledot* headings. This section is also modeled after the Mesopotamian tradition which is reflected in the Sumerian king list which was written as early as the third millenium. The tradition is still alive as late as 300 B.C. where it is found in the work of Berossus the Babylonian priest who wrote a Mesopotamian history in Greek.

By going through the list, one finds several names such as Enoch and Lamech which have already been placed in a Mesopotamian context.

### PRELUDE OF DISASTER (Gen. 6:1-8)

This small section seems to serve the purpose of positing a moral context pending disaster which is to come to the earth. What is clear is the tension between mortals and immortals. The biblical reason for punishment has its parallel in the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. After the gods have decided to punish mankind, one of the gods, Ea, makes a

dramatic speech to Enlil and in that speech he basically asked for a reduced sentence. In the opinion of Ea, the punishment is too severe for the crime. It is clear that both gods are aware that mankind was guilty and humanity was to be punished. The reader should note that the author has added verses 5 through 8 to this section because verse 9 begins with a *toledot*.

### THE FLOOD (Gen. 6:9—8:22)

The flood story of the Bible is paralleled by several flood stories from cuneiform sources.<sup>5</sup> The most extensive parallel can be found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. By comparing the stories, one finds that there is a hero who is separated from condemned humanity in order that he may be saved. He is delivered from pending doom because of positive qualities within his life.

To facilitate deliverance, the hero is told to build a boat, and specific details are given in the construction plans. After the boat is built, there are other people and animals who are to benefit from the protection of the storm which destroys all life outside the boat. At the appropriate time, there are birds released to test the level of the declining waters, and both accounts mention doves and ravens. Finally, when the dry land appears, each hero offers a sacrifice to express his gratitude for deliverance. In the Mesopotamian account, the gods "smelled the sweet aroma" and "crowded like flies about the sacrifice." While there are many similarities in the two accounts, it should be noted again that while many gods are active in the scenario of Mesopotamia, it is Yahweh alone who acts in the biblical account. This observation is enough to quell the fears of all Bible students who have become alarmed since the latter part of the last century when George Smith announced to the scholarly world that there was a cuneiform account of the flood story.

### A BLESSING AND COVENANT (Gen. 9:1-17)

This section of the biblical account has one parallel in the



Gilgamesh epic for Utnapishtim, the flood story hero, is given immortality because of his faithfulness and he settles in the land of Dilmun which is in the general vicinity of the area, East of Eden in 4:16. Dilmun has been associated with the present day Bahrain in the Persian Gulf.

Noah is blessed with a sign of the covenant that God has made with mankind never to destroy the earth again with a flood. To serve a reminder, the rainbow is placed in the sky which suggests certain meteorological changes have occurred.

### NOAH AND HIS SONS (Gen. 9:18-29)

This is a puzzling passage which seems to link the antediluvian period with the postdiluvian age. That break is found in the Sumerian king list, but there seems to be no other connection. It should be noted that these two references to the flood as a divider do attest to the historicity of the flood.

### THE TABLES OF NATIONS (Gen. 10:1-32)

The Tables of Nations is an outstanding example of an ancient attempt to classify the people of the known world on the basis of ethnic considerations. This classification is different from the modern perspective which is based on linguistic considerations. For example, the grouping of Hamitic and Semitic nations is done on this basis.<sup>6</sup>

In verses 8 and 10, there are two terms whose spelling in Hebrew is the same but they refer to two different geographical areas. One is in the area of Egypt and the other is Kashu in the area of Mesopotamia. It is the second Cush who becomes the father of Nimrod and is described with a political designation. From the description of Nimrod, there emerges a proverb which reflects both literary and theological concepts. This Nimrod has been identified by Speiser as Tukulti-Ninurta who was the Assyrian ruler who conquered Babylonia.<sup>7</sup>

### THE TOWER OF BABEL (Gen. 11:1-9)

This section is rooted deeply into a Mesopotamian setting,

and many scholars have assumed that the ziggurat in Babylon would be the basis for the story. Chronologically, this is a problem for the structure which was described by the Greeks was built by Nabopalassar and Nebruhadnezzar in the seventh and sixth centuries, B.C.

To find the parallel of this section in the Mesopotamian literature, one goes again to *Enuma elish* VI, lines 60-62, in which one finds a description of the building of Babylon along with its temple. One line reads, "They raised the head of Esagila toward Apsu." Apsu is used in the sense of heavenly, and the Sumerian word Esagilu means "the structure with a raised head." It was an original ziggurat in Babylon which seems to be the basis of the story.

### GENEALOGIES FROM SHEM TO ABRAHAM (Gen. 11:10-32)

To read this genealogical list is to see the Mesopotamian connection, and one can assume that some of this material can be dated to the time of Abraham. From the biblical point of view, the genealogies are used to close the primeval record in preparation for the call of one person who becomes the father of the Hebrews. In this sense, chapters 1 through 11 become the prologue for the whole Bible. It has already been noted that the concept of a prologue is found in Mesopotamian literature.

The section in the Hebrew Bible is the fifth section which is entitled a *toledot*. In verse 27 there is a *toledot* or Terah. In the remaining thirty-nine chapters, there are four more sections designated as *toledot*.

With the closing of this section, the story moves to a more personal and dramatic revelation of God to his people, beginning with Abraham.

I conclude with three observations:

First, the Bible was not written in a cultural vacuum, and the book of Genesis illustrates this concept by documenting the move from a Mesopotamian cultural setting to a setting in Canaan with a few side trips to Egypt.

Second, the story of Genesis sets the stage for the unfolding



of the human drama, and this drama is orchestrated by a God who acts and continues to be involved in the lives of his people.

Third, the archaeological discoveries do not prove the Bible, for the Bible is a book of faith, but the discoveries do broaden one's understanding of the book and help one to see the cultural context in which the characters of Scriptures lived and exercised their faith. This should be paramount in the human experience in the twentieth century.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 129.

<sup>2</sup>"The Creation Epic," trans. E. A. Speiser in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed., ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 60-72.

<sup>3</sup>For a thorough discussion, cf. Speiser, *Oriental and Biblical Studies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967), 23.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Sumerian King List," in *Assyriological Studies*, Vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 70f.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. S. N. Kramer, *From the Tablets of Sumer* (Indian Hills, Colo.: Falcon's Wing Press, 1956), 176ff.

<sup>6</sup>See E. A. Speiser, "Man, Ethnic Divisions O.T.," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. K-Q (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1962), 235ff.

<sup>7</sup>See Speiser, *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, 41.

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## HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS: EGYPT

Harvey Porter

Egypt was an interesting and fascinating land when Abraham and Sarah viewed it almost four thousand years ago. It continues to allure and enchant Bible students who visit it today. We are able to view many of the marvels that were present in the times of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. Our very first book of the Bible, Genesis, devoted the major part of twenty of its fifty chapters to Abraham and his descendants in Egypt. Egypt is mentioned seventy-seven times in Genesis and about 580 times in the whole of the Old Testament. This makes us aware of the impact this country had upon the people of God. The Genesis narrative of the patriarchs in Egypt covers more than four hundred years.

Liberal scholars have long doubted the authenticity of the accounts of the biblical patriarchs. They see them as myth or folklore. Serious students of the Bible recognize that archaeology has done much to illuminate these sections of the biblical account and to substantiate the credibility of the record. Some see proof of the antiquity of Moses' account and to substantiate the credibility of the record. Some see proof of the antiquity of Moses' account of the patriarchs in Egypt by his use of the Semitic term for Egypt, *misrayim*. The Egyptians called their land by two names, the Black Land and the Red Land. Black (*Kemi*) was the black soil of the cultivable valley of the Nile, which contrasted with the red (*Dsrt*) uncultivated desert. Egyptians commonly referred to their country as the Two Lands (*Tawy*), Red Land (Upper Egypt) and Black Land (Lower Egypt). The Delta area was flooded each season with rich black soil by the Nile River. Upper Egypt did not receive



this large inundation of rich soil in flood time. Hence, the *red land* title.<sup>1</sup> In the Old Testament the Hebrew name for Egypt was Misrayim, which literally meant "the two Egypts."<sup>2</sup> It appears that the Genesis author had a knowledge of the ancient terminology of the Egyptians as they referred to the two parts of their country.

Egypt enjoyed the distinction among all the ancient civilizations of having the best continuous record of history. An Egyptian priest by the name of Manetho (ca. 300 B.C.) had compiled an historical treatise of all the kings and rulers of Egypt from Menes to Alexander the Great, covering thirty dynasties.<sup>3</sup> Historical records of the Bible may often be placed into the framework of Egyptian history, giving us a broader understanding of the people and events of Old Testament history.

Egypt was the first country to be unified under one ruler. The Mesopotamian Valley, the other great early civilization, was composed of city states. Canaan, by contrast, had no centralized government during the time of Abraham, and the small cities were ruled by individual kings. For example, the Genesis account tells that Abraham defeated ten kings when he rescued Lot (Genesis 14). Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek who was king of a city called Salem. When Abraham and Joseph entered Egypt, they must have been amazed at the larger cities and a country unified under one king.

While the writing of the Mesopotamian Valley was cuneiform, the writing of the Egyptians was entirely different. It was hieroglyphic. The Egyptians borrowed little from other cultures. Their geographical location protected them from enemies and isolated them from the influence of other countries to a great degree. It is against this background that the accounts of the patriarchs are cast by Moses. Let us now look at the Genesis record and archaeological findings in the time of Abraham, and in the time of Joseph, and of the locale of the Land of Goshen (Zoan).

## ABRAHAM IN THE LAND OF EGYPT

Scholars differ in dating the Patriarchal Age. William F. Albright, Nelson Glueck, Roland de Vaux, and G. Ernest Wright, all biblical scholars and noted archaeologists, place it 2000 to 1700 B.C.<sup>4</sup> Kitchen suggests these criteria:

First, we must look to see if any major events in the Patriarchal narratives can be linked with external history. Secondly, we must note evidences of date preserved in details of the narratives (personal names, legal usages, etc.) in Near Eastern context. Thirdly, we must consider possible chronological links between the Patriarchal and later epochs.<sup>5</sup>

K. A. Kitchen lists as a major event of this kind the raid of the four Eastern kings in Genesis 14. Nelson Glueck, who for thirty years excavated and made archaeological surveys of the Transjordan, found evidence of a sharp decrease in the occupation there for the period between the nineteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. Glueck linked this to the destruction mentioned in Genesis 14.<sup>6</sup> This suggests placing Abraham before 1800 B.C.

Second, looking for major events in external history which correlate with biblical happenings, Kitchen cites the names of four Eastern kings of the period c. 2000-1700 B.C., which are recorded in Genesis 14. Arioch, Tidal, Chedorlaomer, and Amraphel are names all found in the archives of Nuzi, the Mari archives, and Hittite and Elamite records.<sup>7</sup>

Third, Kitchen calls attention to the system of power-alliances, that is, four kings against five, as recorded in Genesis 14. This kind of power alliance was typical of the politics of the period c. 2000-1750 B.C. He states that this was not the case before or after this period. This record in Genesis fits well into historical happenings of that period.<sup>8</sup> An army expedition of this kind, coming all the way from Mesopotamia into the West, was not unusual during this time.

As we search for indications of date in the biblical narrative, as Kitchen indicated, we find that the personal names of the patriarchs and their offspring can be found in identical form or



similarly formed names both in Mesopotamian and in Egyptian records.<sup>9</sup>

Abraham and Isaac were both keepers of flocks and herds in Canaan. They sometimes grew crops of grain (Genesis 26; 37). These activities fit best in the Middle Bronze Age I period, c. 2100-1800 B.C.<sup>10</sup> Freedom to travel was enjoyed to a greater degree during this period than at other times. Abraham sent all the way back to Haran for Isaac's wife. There was free travel of large trading caravans, and semi-nomadic tribes ranged for great distances.<sup>11</sup>

Abraham's receiving his wife's handmaiden, Hagar, to bear them a son, Ishmael, finds direct correspondence in the customs of Mesopotamia as recorded in the Nuzi archives.<sup>12</sup> Abraham's transaction with Ephron the Hittite in Genesis 23 is an exact parallel to the Hittite laws of land tenure.<sup>13</sup>

Kitchen's third method for evidence that the Genesis narrative of the patriarchs fits well into the period of c. 2000-1700 B.C. is called "Links With Later Periods." There are predictive elements in the narrative which are fulfilled in later books of the Bible. For example, Abraham predicted that his descendants would dwell in an alien land for four hundred years (Gen. 15:13). Abraham was told by God that his descendants would again enter the land of Canaan in "the fourth generation" (Gen. 15:16). The Hebrew word *dor* is best translated here as "one hundred years." The word can mean "span" or "cycle of time" as translated from Ugaritic and Assyrian sources.<sup>14</sup> The prediction was fulfilled when Abraham's descendants re-entered Canaan four hundred years later.

We must conclude from this evidence that the patriarchs fit very well into the period of the twentieth to the eighteenth century B.C. Archaeology has supplied places, names, and events that corroborate the Genesis narrative at this point.

From the archaeology of ancient Egypt we may conclude that Abraham and his descendants in Egypt would have looked with awe upon the pyramid complex at Giza. These wonders of both the ancient and modern world were almost eight hundred years old when Abraham arrived. The pharaoh Abraham encountered probably located his capital at Memphis. Excava-

tions of Memphis and the royal burial ground at Sakkara continue to produce marvelous artifacts, testifying to the greatness of Memphis.

Abraham had left a great civilization at Ur, but Egypt surpassed it. Ur had pyramidal structures called ziggurats, but they were much smaller than the pyramids of Egypt. Ur was ruled by a city-king. Pharaoh of Egypt ruled the whole country. Ur had a small army; Egypt boasted a national army. The great River Nile surpassed even the mighty Euphrates that Abraham had lived beside in Ur.

Abraham's life in the land of Canaan had nothing to compare with the wonders of Ur and Egypt. While in Canaan he lived as a bedouin following his flocks and herds as they found pasturage. He "dwelt in tents." An exile from Egypt who fled to the land of Canaan during the time of Abraham wrote a story which is called "The Tale of Sinuhe." Ancient copies are in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England. He spoke of the abundance of the land. His description paralleled what we later read in Exodus 3 and Deuteronomy 8. He recorded that "Figs were in it, and grapes. It had more wine than water. Plentiful was its honey, abundant its olives. Every kind of fruit was on its trees. Barley was there, and emmer. There was no limit to any kind of cattle."<sup>15</sup>

These references and the ruins that exist today give us a good picture of Canaan in the time of Abraham.

## EGYPT IN THE TIME OF JOSEPH

Most scholars place Joseph's arrival in Egypt sometime in the period of 1786-1633 B.C. This period is called the Second Intermediate Period of Egyptian history. Manetho's King List shows that the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Dynasties occurred during this time frame, with the Fifteenth and Sixteenth being Hyksos kings.

Jack Finegan and others point out that there is evidence of the increasing presence of Asiatics in Egypt during the period. A papyrus fragment in the Brooklyn Museum (no. 35.1446) contains a list of ninety-five servants in the household of an



Egyptian official in Upper Egypt with nearly thirty of the names on the list being Semitic.<sup>16</sup> There is evidence in the Turin Canon that during the Thirteenth Dynasty, Asiatics were coming into the Delta of Egypt in increasing numbers.<sup>17</sup> These invaders were called by the Egyptians "Chiefs of Foreign Lands." This designation was already found in the Story of Sinuhe and in the Tomb of Khnumhotep II to describe chieftans of Palestine and Syria.<sup>18</sup> These "chiefs" established themselves as rulers in Lower Egypt during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Dynasties. Manetho wrote that they conquered Memphis, the great northern capital of Egypt, and most of the towns of the Black Land area referred to today as Lower Egypt. He recorded many of their names in the King List and said that one of them, whose name was Salitis, built the city of Avaris.<sup>19</sup> This period matches well with biblical chronology for the arrival of Joseph's being brought to Egypt as a slave. J. A. Wilson states that the Hyksos established their capital at Avaris in the East Delta and took over the whole of Northern Egypt. They introduced into Egypt the horse and chariot, the composite bow, a heavier sword, and body armor.<sup>20</sup> Genesis 41 records that Pharaoh "had him [Joseph] ride in a chariot as his second-in-command. . . ." The Hyksos appointed Semitic officials in their courts. Joseph's story, found in Genesis 37—50, fits perfectly. Records name many other Semitic servants in the households of important Egyptians. The pictures of royal court etiquette fit exactly Moses' descriptions in Genesis 41 and 43. All the important events of Egyptian history during this time period take place in this Delta area. The Hyksos were the dominant power in all of Egypt for about two hundred years. Thebes of Upper Egypt was the rival capital. The Delta was not prominent in Egyptian history until the Nineteenth Dynasty, the time of Seti I and Ramesses II.<sup>21</sup> This is the probable time of the building of the store cities of Pithom and Ramesses by the children of Israel.

Genesis says that Joseph served in Potiphar's house. The name "Potiphar" was very common during this period. The titles by which Potiphar was described in Genesis 39, "officer" (Egyptian, *saris*) and "captain of the guard" (Egyptian, *sar-*

*hattabbahim*), i.e., Pharaoh's bodyguard, are substantiated by records of this time. The same can be said for the titles of "butler" and "baker" as used by Moses in the Genesis record.<sup>22</sup>

The Bible tells that Pharaoh gave Joseph the Egyptian name of Zaphenath-Paneah, which was a common name in the Middle Kingdom and the Hyksos period. This would be the time of the patriarchs and Joseph.<sup>23</sup>

Genesis specifies that when Jacob died Joseph ordered the physicians of Egypt to embalm his father. "So the physicians embalmed him, taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days" (Gen. 50:3). Kitchen states that the "seventy days" for the mourning was characteristic, but that the "forty days" for the embalming might vary.<sup>24</sup> It is noteworthy that the price paid for Joseph as a slave, twenty shekels, was correct as the average price of a slave in the eighteenth century B.C. Joseph was an interpreter of dreams (Genesis 41). The role of dreams is well-known in all the periods of Egypt's history.<sup>25</sup>

Gen. 41:45 states that "Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife." On was one of the northern capitals of ancient Egypt. The Greeks later called it Heliopolis, which meant city of the sun, because the Egyptian God Re, god of the sun, was worshiped there. Even Potiphera's name included the name of the sun god Re.<sup>26</sup> The biblical account is certainly in tune with the nature and worship of this place and period. On, Memphis, and Thebes were the capitals of ancient Egypt. All three are mentioned in the correct historical milieu in the Bible.

The ruins of On are in the northeastern outskirts of Cairo in the midst of well-cultivated fields near the section of the city called El-Matariya. On, like many biblical sites, cannot be excavated because of the modern buildings covering the area. There is, however, an obelisk of red Aswan granite, sixty-seven feet tall, bearing the name of Pharaoh Sesostri I.<sup>27</sup> Dating based upon Manetho's record would indicate that Sesostri ruled from 1971 to 1928 B.C.<sup>28</sup> This obelisk was standing when both Abraham and Joseph were in the land.



Archaeology has confirmed that the Genesis account of Joseph in Egypt corresponds in every way to the environment of Lower Egypt at that time.

### THE LAND OF GOSHEN AND THE "LAND OF RAMESES"

Genesis stated that Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you, and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen" (Gen. 47:6). Moses continued the record by saying, "So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses, as Pharaoh directed" (Gen. 47:11). Most scholars believe that Goshen and the district of Rameses describe the same area.

Another city of this area appears in the Bible. It is Zoan. It is first found in Num. 13:22, in a parenthetical statement, "(Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)" Zoan is found in six more passages. In Psalm 78, the writer said, "He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan" (v. 12). K. A. Kitchen states that the Egyptian word for Zoan corresponds exactly to the Hebrew word *so'an*.<sup>29</sup> The Septuagint translated *so'an* as Tanis, a city in northeastern Delta near the modern village of San el-Hagar. It may have been founded by the Hyksos in the sixteenth century B.C. and could have been the same as Avaris, the main capital of the Hyksos. Zoan is mentioned in Isaiah 19 and 30, showing that it was an important Egyptian city in the eighth century before Christ. Zoan appears again in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 30 (c. sixth century B.C.) as a capital city of Egypt. It occurs in Egyptian records from the 1100s to about 660 B.C., showing that it was still an important capital for many years.

A third city important in this era was Ra'amses (KJV) or "Rameses" in most modern versions. It is transliterated from the Egyptian as Pi-Rameses into English, which is "Domain of Rameses."<sup>30</sup> Moses wrote that Pharaoh compelled the

children of Israel to build for him the store cities of Pithom and Rameses (Ex. 1:11). The name appears in Gen. 47:11, Ex. 12:37, and Num. 33:3, 5. Early archaeologists identified Rameses with Tanis. It is thought that Rameses II of the Nineteenth Dynasty may have rebuilt on the ruins of the cities of the Hyksos to remove their memory and to take advantage of their strategic locations.<sup>31</sup> In 1860, A. Mariette excavated at Tanis with remarkable results, finding colossi, sphinxes, and stelae, one of which was the famous 400-Year Stele.<sup>32</sup> Rameses' name was written on most of the objects. William Flinders Petrie followed in excavation work here, concluding, as did Mariette, that Tanis was the city of Rameses of the Bible. Pierre Montet began excavating there in 1929 and continued for twenty seasons. Montet felt strongly that Tanis was the biblical Pi-Rameses. The Tanis site as biblical Pi-Rameses was also favored by such notables as William F. Albright and Alan Gardiner.

Mahmud Hamza, along with some others, proposed Qantir, some twelve miles south of Tanis, as the site of Rameses' store city. His work was about 1930. Recent times have found more Egyptologists favoring Qantir as the Pi-Rameses of the Bible.

Biblical archaeologists are interested in the location of these Hyksos cities in the time of Joseph because they offer material evidence of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt. The evidence indicates that they were in the northeastern Delta area for the four hundred-year period.

It appears that the Israelites had a very good life until the Egyptians drove the Hyksos out. Egyptian records say that King Kamose of Thebes of the Seventeenth Dynasty finally expelled the Hyksos from northern Egypt, except for the city of Avaris. T. G. H. James in *The Cambridge Ancient History* places the beginning of this expulsion at about 1575 B.C.<sup>33</sup> His successor, Ahmose I, who founded the Eighteenth Dynasty, expelled the rest of the Hyksos and began what is known as the New Kingdom period. Ahmose would probably have been "the new king who knew not Joseph" of Ex. 1:8. These new Egyptian rulers, the Eighteenth Dynasty, lasted for 2½ centuries.



The enslavement of the Israelites in this area and time fits well the times and place of this section of Egyptian history.

The Hyksos had occupied the Egyptian town of Hatwaret or Avaris and made it their principal capital. When kings of the Nineteenth Dynasty began rebuilding in the Goshen area, it was natural that they rebuild or reoccupy Avaris. The Nineteenth Dynasty began about 1309 B.C. The two most important kings of this Dynasty were Sethos I (or Seti I) and his son Ramesses II. The Hyksos had made the god Seth the principal deity of Avaris and the northern region. Sethos I took his name from this god of Avaris. It was a very fortunate find when Pierre Montet unearthed what is now called "The 400-Year Stele." This stele commemorated the four hundredth anniversary of the founding of Avaris and its dedication to the god Seth. The anniversary was apparently celebrated about 1320 B.C. during the reign of Horemheb of the Eighteenth Dynasty. It was Ramesses II, however, who erected the granite stele on the site of Avaris.<sup>34</sup> If the exodus of the Israelites, as many believe, was during the early part of the sixty-six-year reign of Ramesses II, this four-hundred-year stele sheds light on their stay in Egypt.

The Bible states that the Israelites left Egypt from Pi-Ramesses, which archaeologists have identified as Tanis or Qantir, or both. Both were original foundations by Sethos I and Ramesses II. Avaris is very near Qantir which is only twelve miles from Tanis. K. A. Kitchen as early as 1966 proposed that Pi-Ramesses included the whole area of Avaris and Tanis. He translates Pi-Ramesses "in the broad (and administratively-correct) sense of 'Estate' (not house) of Ramesses, including Tanis and Qantir in one domain of scattered settlements and institutions."<sup>35</sup> Kitchen cites Gardiner, A. Alt, and H. Kees as in agreement with this interpretation.

Probably the most recent scholarly observations on the location of these cities are to be found in a book by T. G. H. James entitled *Ancient Egypt: The Land and Its Legacy* published in 1988. James distinguished himself as an Egyptologist and Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum for more than twenty years. He stated,

Piramesse is almost without a doubt to be placed at Qantir, about fifteen miles south of Tanis, where the remains of royal palaces and associated buildings have been found; while Avaris was located at Tell el-Daba, a site which in antiquity probably lay within the broad boundaries of Piramesse.<sup>36</sup>

James states that Ramesses II built a royal summer palace in or near Avaris and here the new city of Pi-Ramesses was established. It is believed that huge quantities of sculptures from earlier periods were shipped down the river to provide his new city with great monuments. Other pharaohs' names were erased, and Ramesses' name replaced them. Near the close of the Twentieth Dynasty (about 1080 B.C.), the branch of the Nile that flowed by Pi-Ramesses silted up and ceased to be a waterway. For practical reasons, Tanis then became the most important Delta city, and the kings of the Twenty-first and Twenty-second Dynasties did what Ramesses had done: they shifted the magnificent statues to the city of Tanis.<sup>37</sup> It is easy to see why so many excavators were confused by the monuments found at Tanis.

## CONCLUSION

We have categorized the historic sections of Genesis' references to Egypt in (1) The Time of Abraham in Egypt, (2) The Time of Joseph in Egypt, and (3) The Time of the Land of Goshen-Zoan in Egypt. Biblical archaeology is able to corroborate names and places and happenings found in the biblical text with the same from secular texts. Biblical archaeology also illuminates the sacred story and happenings. While we cannot corroborate names from this early period in Genesis, we can feel with confidence that time frames of both Abraham and Joseph are substantiated and that the Land of Goshen (Zoan) is indeed corroborated. We have knowledge of the nature of the life and customs of the Hyksos, the Egyptians, and the children of Israel during these ancient times.

The spade of the archaeologist has increased our knowledge and faith in the historical sections of the divine record and has



given us a greater appreciation for the reliability and authenticity of our Bible.

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Jack Finegan, *Archaeological History of the Ancient Middle East* (New York: Dorsett Press, 1986), 191.
- <sup>2</sup>Jack Finegan, *Light From the Ancient Past: The Archaeological Background of Judaism and Christianity*. 2d ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), 81.
- <sup>3</sup>George Steindorff and Keith C. Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 7.
- <sup>4</sup>K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966), 42.
- <sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.
- <sup>6</sup>Nelson Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1970), 114, 121.
- <sup>7</sup>Kitchen, 44.
- <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.
- <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.
- <sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.
- <sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>12</sup>G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 43-44.
- <sup>13</sup>Kitchen, 154.
- <sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.
- <sup>15</sup>Finegan, *Light From Past*, 92.
- <sup>16</sup>Finegan, *Archaeological History*, 251.
- <sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 252.
- <sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 253.
- <sup>20</sup>J. A. Wilson, "Egypt," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, E-J*, ed. Keith R. Crim (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 47.
- <sup>21</sup>K. A. Kitchen, "Egypt," in *The New Bible Dictionary*, 2d ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 304.
- <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 618-19.
- <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 620.
- <sup>25</sup>K. A. Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 74.
- <sup>26</sup>Kitchen, "On," in *New Bible Dictionary*, 858.
- <sup>27</sup>Baedeker's *Egypt* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1990), 196.
- <sup>28</sup>Finegan, *Archaeological History*, 238.
- <sup>29</sup>Kitchen, "Zoan," in *New Bible Dictionary*, 1282.
- <sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 1006.
- <sup>31</sup>Finegan, *Light From Past*, 114.
- <sup>32</sup>C. E. DeVries, "Zoan," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 1202.

- <sup>33</sup>T. G. H. James, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, II, Part I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 290.
- <sup>34</sup>William C. Hayes, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, II, Part I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 57.
- <sup>35</sup>Kitchen, *Ancient Orient*, footnote on page 59.
- <sup>36</sup>T. G. H. James, *Ancient Egypt: The Land and Its Legacy* (London: British Museum Publications, 1988), 24.
- <sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

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## THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS TO GENESIS: SYRO-PALESTINIAN ERA

Jack P. Lewis

This study centers on light cast on the book of Genesis by discoveries made in Syro-Palestinian archaeology. The exciting finds made in Mesopotamia, beginning in the last century, lie outside this geographical region except as those epics of creation and the flood were also known in the western region. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are set in Mesopotamia, not in Syro-Palestine. By its geographical limitation the study makes no suggestion that Mesopotamian studies are in any way insignificant.

### MANUSCRIPTS

The study of Genesis has benefited by manuscript discovery as has the study of all the Old Testament. The Leningrad and Aleppo codices give a text of Genesis from the tenth Christian century. These codices have both been reproduced in facsimile and are now public property for investigation of all scholars.

No Genesis scroll comparable to the Isaiah scroll is in the Qumran finds, but there are fragments. Joseph Fitzmyer lists twenty-six items relevant to various passages;<sup>1</sup> however, not all are actually biblical texts. The material comes from Caves 1,<sup>2</sup> 2,<sup>3</sup> 4,<sup>4</sup> 6,<sup>5</sup> and 8.<sup>6</sup> Eleven fragments from Cave 4 remain yet unpublished.<sup>7</sup> In addition, there are fragments from Masada,<sup>8</sup> Wadi Murabba'at,<sup>9</sup> and Nahal Hever.<sup>10</sup> All of these move knowledge of the text back hundreds of years for the portions they cover.

The Greek text of Genesis also is supported by new manuscripts such as the Berlin Genesis dating from the third cen-



tury.<sup>11</sup> The Chester Beatty Papyri have 22 out of 82 leaves of a late third-century manuscript of Genesis covering scattered material from Gen. 24:1—46:33. A second manuscript of 44 leaves out of 66 dates in the early fourth century and covers scattered sections from Gen. 9:1—42:2.<sup>12</sup>

The Bodmer find of manuscripts includes a Bohairic copy of Gen. 1:1—4:2 dating from the fourth century.<sup>13</sup>

The Aramaic Targum known as Neofiti 1, thought to represent the Palestinian Targum of the first century, enlarges knowledge of the Targum tradition of Genesis.<sup>14</sup> A fragment of a Palestinian Targum to Gen. 15:1-4 dating in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and from the Cairo Geniza has been identified in the Hebrew Union College Library.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to biblical manuscripts conjectured to date at the end of the first century B.C. or the first half of the first century A.D. already mentioned, Qumran also supplied a manuscript in Aramaic known as *The Genesis Apocryphon*.<sup>16</sup> Among other things, this document has material concerning Lamech and an unusual description of the charms of Sarah. While no scholar would suppose this document has objective, historical content, it does reveal interpretative trends in a Palestinian sect. Fragments of *The Book of Jubilees* are relevant to Gen. 25:7, 8, 9; 28:10, 11; and 50:22, 26. The *Cairo Damascus Document* alludes to Gen. 1:27 and 7:9.

## BEFORE ABRAHAM

Conditions in Syria before the days of Abraham have been marvelously illuminated by the Ebla texts discovered following 1975 at Tell Mardikh thirty miles south of Aleppo and fifty-five from the Mediterranean. A literate culture of international proportions previously undreamed of has come to light. Despite extravagant claims made in the early days which had an Ebla text list the cities of the plain in the same sequence they are given in the Bible—a claim later retracted—the Ebla find has changed opinions about the territory Abraham would have traveled through in coming from Haran to Shechem.

The 16,000 Ebla cuneiform tablets written in Sumerian and

Canaanite (Eblite) contain references to Hazor, Megiddo, Gaza, and 'urusalima (Jerusalem).<sup>17</sup> They have allusions to a creation of the world.<sup>18</sup> They show that before the patriarchs Syro-Palestine shared in the myths and cultural traditions of Sumer and Akkad. The Ebla pantheon had almost five hundred divinities, male and female.

A fragment of a cuneiform tablet containing portions of the Gilgamesh epic was picked up about 1958 near the dump of the earlier excavation at Megiddo. The fragment is conjecturally dated to the Amarna age (fourteenth century B.C.) and is a significant witness to knowledge in Palestine of that epic which in other tablets contained a Mesopotamian story of a flood.<sup>19</sup> The extent of that knowledge cannot be known.

Much of the history of the land had gone by before Abraham appeared on the scene, whatever period is assigned to him. The lower levels of Jericho are assigned to 7,000 B.C. by Dame Kenyon. The Carmel caves, 'Ubeidiyah, and Beer-sheba are prehistoric of various periods. Palestine also has numerous Early Bronze Age sites some of which, like Arad,<sup>20</sup> have been excavated.

## THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

The book of Genesis is neither an archaeological survey of nor a history of Canaan. It presents a theology of history whose claims are not subject to either archaeological or historical investigation because of lack of relevant data. At its heart is its claim that God chose one man and his descendants, promised them a land, and directed their migrations for his purpose. Archaeology can neither prove or disprove these claims.

In considering the scenery against which this claim is depicted, one deals with two non-connected types of data. Pottery styles, weapons, and city ramparts which consume archaeologists' time go unnoticed in Genesis. The writer of the biblical narrative reveals no interest in such objects, and Palestinian archaeological finds have turned up no objects directly related to any person or event mentioned in Genesis. All we can know of these persons and events comes from the Bible itself.



If one knew for certain the dates of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he could with more confidence assign finds dated from the current archaeological dating system to their period. However, even the dates and names assigned to the archaeological periods are themselves subject to further refinement as additional finds are made.

The story of the patriarchs, after their arrival in Canaan, is largely played out on the mountain ridge of the country. The limits cover from the wilderness on the way to Shur (Gen. 16:7) to the Valley of Dothan (Gen. 37:17). The Galilee does not enter the Genesis scene. The sea-coast plain is only approached as Abraham and Isaac come to Gerar in the northwestern Negeb. The Judah and Tamar story is at Enaim on the road to Timnah (Gen. 38:14). The Sinai is unmentioned but would have had to be crossed as Abraham, Joseph, and Jacob went to Egypt. Ishmael is in the wilderness of Paran (Gen. 21:20, 21; 25:13-18). The rift valley, including the Arabah, which is the most distinctive geological feature of the country, only enters the picture with Lot's choice of that region (Gen. 13:12), the invasion of the kings (Genesis 14), and the destruction of Sodom. The north trans-Jordan region was probably traversed by Abraham's servant on his journey to seek a wife for Isaac and was crossed by Jacob on his journey to Padan-aram and on his return. The sites of Mizpah, Mahanaim, Penuel, and Succoth in the "mountains of Gilead" are mentioned. The south had Edom which became the territory of Esau.

Not anyone would suppose that the cities mentioned in Genesis were the only cities of importance, whatever date one concludes for the patriarchs. Places like Tell Beit Mirsim, Lachish, Megiddo, Hazor, Jericho, Aphek, Gezer, and others would have existed. Sites in the coastal plain, also not mentioned in Genesis, have been excavated revealing strata of the Middle Bronze Age. Approximately four hundred Middle Bronze Age sites in the country are known.<sup>21</sup>

## THE DATE OF THE PATRIARCHS

The study of the date of the patriarchs has left the floor

strewn with the bleaching bones of rejected theories. Though writing was known in the Middle East many centuries before the patriarchs, there are no allusions to writing in Genesis. No contemporary record outside the Bible exists to which one might compare its narratives. Palestinian archaeology has been particularly poor in discoveries of written material. The climate on the mountain is too harsh for papyrus and wood to survive. Cuneiform writing from the Middle Bronze Age IIB has been found at Hazor.<sup>22</sup> The earliest alphabetic letters thus far identified are from jars found at Gezer dating in the sixteenth century.<sup>23</sup> "There is no representational art from Palestine in this period, and little figural art."<sup>24</sup> Of necessity a study of this sort has to be limited to consideration of possible background illustration.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Genesis are presented as camping near but outside such cities as Shechem, Hebron, Jerusalem, Gerar, and Beer-sheba. They are religious pilgrims but are not significant political, military, or social figures about whom records are ordinarily preserved. They built no cities; they won no major battles; they ruled over no people. Egyptian rulers with whom the patriarchs had contact are designated by their title Pharaoh, but not by a personal name, leaving no way to identify them with rulers known from Egyptian records.

Biblical data suggests that the Exodus from Egypt took place 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon's reign (1 Kings 6:1) which if taken factually gives a date of approximately 1440 B.C. Then Ex. 12:40 (cf. Gen. 15:13) suggests that 430 years lapsed between Jacob's descent into Egypt and the Exodus, and that suggests a date of 1870 B.C. for Israel's coming to Egypt. If one adds the years of the patriarchs, one gets an approximate date of 2167 B.C. for the birth of Abraham. The Septuagint, however, gives 215 years (Ex. 12:40) as the time of the bondage, hence allowing a calculated 1887 B.C. for Abraham's entrance into Canaan. Various expedients are used by modern biblical scholars for dealing with these dates. Syro-Palestinian archaeologists attempt to depict the archaeological history of the country without being bound by them.



There is no more perplexing question on which scholars disagree more widely than on the date of the Patriarchal Age. A generation ago, W. F. Albright and Nelson Glueck<sup>25</sup> dated the patriarchs in the Middle Bronze I Age (twenty-first through nineteenth centuries B.C.). Albright later lowered his dates for the transition from MB I to MB IIA to the nineteenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries.<sup>26</sup> Today some Israeli scholars favor the Middle Bronze II Age (eighteenth through sixteenth centuries B.C.).<sup>27</sup> Cyrus Gordon, on the basis of alleged Nuzi parallels, favored the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 B.C.).<sup>28</sup> An influential challenge of the Albright, Gordon, Speiser case has been launched by Thompson and Van Seters who would see an even later date.<sup>29</sup> Their case rests largely on negative evidence, and that sort of evidence is subject to change. One of the problems in the dating of the patriarchs is the lack of identifiable MB IIA sites in the Negeb.<sup>30</sup> The puzzle of the date of the patriarchs remains unsolved because there are no direct contacts in the data being considered.<sup>31</sup>

### THE SETTING OF GENESIS

A related major historical and archaeological question presented by the book of Genesis is that of the "life setting" of the material the book represents. A hundred years ago Wellhausen claimed,

It is true, we attain to no historical knowledge of the patriarchs, but only of the time when the stories about them arose in the Israelite people; this later age is here unconsciously projected, in its inner and its outward features, into hoary antiquity, and is reflected there like a glorified mirage.<sup>32</sup>

Albright, Glueck, Wright, Gordon, and Speiser claimed that archaeological finds demonstrated the contrary. Now the cases of Thompson and Van Seters present claims like those of Wellhausen, and the case repeated in many modern treatments is that the life situation of Genesis is that of the period of the monarchy, not the period of the figures of which it speaks.<sup>33</sup>

The popular writer G. Cornfeld summarized:

Admittedly, there are too many Philistines, Arameans, and camels, not to speak of other major and minor points, for anyone to be comfortable with the traditional views which relegate the Patriarchs to a background of the Middle Bronze Age.<sup>34</sup>

D. J. Wiseman has replied to Van Seters' contention that the use of tents (cf. Gen. 12:8; etc.) in the Genesis narrative fits the mid-first millennium better than the second. Wiseman has collected thirty or more examples in Mesopotamian and Egyptian texts of the Middle Bronze Age that refer to tents. He insists that they are more numerous than such texts of the first millennium.<sup>35</sup>

Like other areas of study, archaeology has had its false starts. It has been popular to illustrate the Patriarchal stories from the Nuzi texts with such customs as the substitute wife (cf. Gen. 16:1-16), the sale of the birthright (cf. Gen. 25:32-34), the possession of the household teraphim (cf. Gen. 31:19-55), and others. Assuming the customs were limited to the Nuzi region and period, the case did not explain adequately how the patriarchs who were never east of the Tigris came into contact with these customs. If the customs were not limited to that period of time, then they become unreliable data for dating the patriarchs.<sup>36</sup>

A further fallacy has been indulged in where one sees the scholar slightly modifying the biblical story to make it parallel with the alleged illustration. For example, the episode of Rachel and the teraphim says nothing of possession giving leadership of the clan. The element is assumed and then the parallel declared. Actually, rather than seeking leadership of the clan, Jacob was leaving the area and Laban's family permanently. In another example, the alleged feudal obligation connected with the area of the cave of Machpelah has been assumed in the silence of Genesis.<sup>37</sup> Much that has been written in the area of parallels will have to be redone.

There is no question that the book of Genesis continues to offer some long-standing puzzles to the student. Included are



the references to the Philistines (Gen. 21:32-34; 26:1, 14-18). Philistines known from Egyptian sources appear in the second half of the thirteenth century B.C.<sup>38</sup> Some studies of Genesis offer as a counter hypothesis that the Philistines of Genesis represent an earlier migration of the "sea peoples."<sup>39</sup> The Arameans who appear in Assyrian documents of the fourteenth to thirteenth centuries B.C. are also a puzzle. We do not have information to solve these anomalies at this time. It would be wholesome to be reminded that when Columbus left Spain in 1492 there was no evidence that the New World existed. Who knows what a day may bring forth?

In what is a complete oversimplification, however, it would seem to this writer that there are elements in Genesis that do not fit the period of the kings. The behavior of the patriarchs is not in harmony with the law given by Moses. Brother-sister marriages (cf. Lev. 18:9; 20:17; Deut. 27:22) and marrying two sisters (Lev. 18:18) are permitted. The father-in-law takes the widow of his son (cf. Lev. 18:15; 20:12), and the adulteress is sentenced to burning (cf. Lev. 21:9). The inheritance rights of the first-born are ignored (cf. Deut. 21:15-17) in the cases of Ishmael, Reuben, Esau, and Manasseh. Concubinage is recognized. The patriarchs erected pillars (cf. Deut. 7:5; 12:3, 4; 16:21, 22).

The worship of the later monarchy plays no role in Genesis. Jerusalem and Zion enter only in the Melchizedek story (Gen. 14:18-20). There are no indications of disputes with the Baal cult which later dominated the northern kingdom. The term "the God of Abraham" is prevalent but not "God of Moses" which would be an anachronism.

### EGYPTIAN INSIGHTS

The exact political relation of Egypt to the Canaanite region at the patriarchal period is yet unclear. Egypt had traded for Lebanese cedar<sup>40</sup> and had carried on campaigns in the area before Abraham's time. Pepi I (ca. 2375 B.C.) carried out a campaign against the land of the Sand Dwellers in which enclosures were thrown down, fig trees and vines cut down,

and troops destroyed in considerable numbers. A place called "Antelope Nose" was reached which may be the Carmel range. A landing is claimed "at the rear of the heights of the mountain range on the north of the land of the Sand Dwellers."<sup>41</sup> A seal impression of Pepi I was found at Ebla in 1979.<sup>42</sup>

Egypt in the Twelfth Dynasty (ca. 1991-1786 B.C.) turned its interests toward Syro-Palestine. Cattle and slaves were imported from Western Asia. Statues of Egyptian officials have been found at Megiddo and Ugarit. There are also scarab seals. A military campaign was carried out, probably against Shechem, by Pharaoh Sin-User III.<sup>43</sup>

The story of Sinuhe, an autobiography dating about 1950 B.C., gives Egyptian information about Palestine. Sinuhe fled Egypt when he saw a new pharaoh assuming the throne. He alludes to Egyptian fortifications ("Shur"; Gen. 25:18) at the eastern border of the Delta. After crossing the Sinai, he comes to the land of Qedem and finds refuge with the ruler of Upper Retenu. The ruler married him to a daughter. Sinuhe left a description of the land:

It was a good land, named Yaa. Figs were in it, and grapes. It had more wine than water. Plentiful was its honey, abundant its olives. Every (kind of) fruit was on its trees. Barley was there, and emmer. There was no limit to (any kind) of cattle.<sup>44</sup>

Sinuhe became commander of the army of Retenu. The population was essentially pastoral. In his old age, Sinuhe turned his holdings over to his sons and returned to Egypt.

Also from Egypt come the Execration texts which are curses against Pharaoh's enemies written on potsherds that date in the twentieth century. There are later texts from clay figurines dating from the nineteenth or eighteenth centuries. The first group has twenty names of towns or regions including Jerusalem, Ashkelon, Beth-shean, and Rehob with names of rulers of which there are from one to four. The second group has sixty-four place names including Apum (Damascus), Beth-shean, Aphek, Ashkelon, Laish, Hazor, Shechem, and Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> These texts indicate that the country is divided into numerous



small political units centering around the towns. The towns were surrounded by semi-nomadic tribes and seem to grow in control by the eighteenth century. The tale of Sinuhe, already mentioned, seems to show towns co-existing with tribes of semi-nomadic pastoralists.

Of special interest is the Beni Hasan tomb painting of the Twelfth Dynasty (nineteenth century B.C.) which depicts a caravan of thirty-seven Asiatics arriving in Egypt.<sup>46</sup> They are from the land of Shutu (thought to be Gilead). Their leader called Ibsha is given the title "Ruler of a Foreign Country," and they are delivering eye-paint to Egypt.

A description of these people gives us our best approach to what patriarchs may have looked like.<sup>47</sup> Ibsha and some others wear knee-length tunics of multicolored patterns with one shoulder bare. Bushy hair comes to the lobe of the ear, and there are thin pointed beards descending from the ear, but no mustaches. Other men are bare to the waist but wear kilts with no two patterns of cloth alike. The men wear sandals.

The women wear dresses which come to the mid-calf with the right shoulder bare. No two cloth patterns are identical. Long hair is held in place by a head band and falls freely down the back. The women wear low boots with a white band at the top. Children are riding on a donkey that has a colorful saddle blanket and a bellows. Another donkey, also with a colorful blanket of another pattern, carries a spear and a bellows.

The men are armed with spears and double-convex bows. One carries a quiver. Another has a lyre and has a water skin over his shoulder. An antelope and a gazelle are brought as offerings.

Other evidence of Egypt's interest in Canaan comes from a tomb inscription (1880-40 B.C.) which tells of taking Sekmem which is thought to be Shechem. Also a statue base of a high-ranking official in the nineteenth century B.C. has been found at Megiddo. The duties of the official are known from his tomb inscription in Egypt. Some Egyptian seal impressions of the period have been found at Jericho.<sup>48</sup>

## GENESIS SITES

### *Canaan*

Throughout the book of Genesis the habitation of Abraham and his descendants is called the land of Canaan (Gen. 13:5; 16:3) and some of its people are called Canaanites (Gen. 12:6; 13:7; 15:21). Only a small part of the patriarchal story is in the area of Beer-sheba that is the land of the Philistines (Gen. 21:32, 34) though these people later left their name to the whole country. The earliest known occurrence of the name Canaan is in a letter from Mari,<sup>49</sup> and of "Canaanite" is from Ebla.<sup>50</sup>

### *Haran*

Haran, first mentioned in Cappadocian texts of the nineteenth century B.C. and later in texts from Mari which also mention Nahor, is located on the Balikh River in what is now Turkey, about twelve miles from the Syrian border. The site is twenty miles south of Urfa (ancient Edessa). Haran, belonging to the area called Mesopotamia or Aram-Naharaim (Aram of the two Rivers), was an important intersection of caravan routes from southern Mesopotamia into Asia Minor and into Syria and on to Egypt. It was a center of the cult of the moon-god Sin. Not only did Abram stop at Haran, but to the neighboring city of Nahor Abraham's servant came to find a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:10), and Jacob spent twenty years in the area in the service of Laban when he was fleeing from the wrath of Esau (Gen. 27:43; 28:10; 29:4).

Anglo-Turkish expeditions excavated at Haran in 1951 and in 1956. Finds of the Assyrian and Babylonian periods were made, but strata of the period of the patriarchs were not penetrated.

Abram's travel from Haran to Shechem carried him about four hundred airline miles. Data is not supplied to know the route followed; however, that Abram had Eliezer of Damascus as a slave (Gen. 15:2) seems adequate basis for concluding that Damascus was on his route. In addition, Abram chased the invading kings to Hobah, north of Damascus (Gen. 14:15).

### *Damascus*

Josephus preserves a tradition (probably unreliable) from



Nicolas of Damascus which attributes a reign in Damascus to Abram though he was an invader from beyond Babylon prior to his departure for Canaan. He also alleges that a village named "Abram's abode" is in the area.<sup>51</sup> A Roman historian Pomplius Tragus included Abram in a list of early kings of Damascus.

Damascus is on the Nahr Barada which flows eastward out of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains. Further to the south is the Nahr el-A'waj. It is conjectured that these streams may be the Abana and Pharpar of the Naaman story (2 Kings 5:12).

The city is known as *Apum* in the Egyptian Execration texts of the nineteenth century B.C. The name Damascus first appears in the Ebla tablets<sup>52</sup> and then in the list of towns conquered by Thutmose III that is inscribed on the walls of the Karnak temple at Luxor.<sup>53</sup> A history of Damascus has been published, most of it dealing with periods later than the patriarchs.<sup>54</sup> The arable land of the oasis is not more than thirteen miles wide; beyond it is pasture land and the Syrian desert. It has no building stone and is not naturally defensible from military attack. No one knows how long the site has been occupied. Excavations have not been carried back to the Middle Bronze Age. The lack of archaeological material for the period prevents making statements about the conditions—whether Damascus was yet a trade center and whether it was yet a fortified town. A tell (Tell es-Salihiyyeh) fifteen kilometers east of Damascus was trenched to the Middle Bronze level by Von der Osten in 1952-53, revealing a rampart fortification. The tell is located so that it had a view of all entrances into the Damascus basin. A second tell (Deir Habiyyeh) located twenty kilometers southwest of Damascus also had rampart fortifications. An old Babylonian cylinder seal attests Middle Bronze trade with Mesopotamia. While Albright thought the *Apum* material mentioned in the Mari texts should be identified with the Damascus area, Pitard, on the basis of publication of additional texts, rejects this possibility.<sup>55</sup>

### *Shechem*

Abraham came into Canaan to the Oak of Moreh at She-

chem and built an altar there (Gen. 12:6). The oak became a notable landmark for centuries (Gen. 35:4; Josh. 24:26; Judg. 9:37). Shechem, also significant in the journeys of Jacob when he returned from Padan-aram, was where Jacob built an altar (Gen. 33:20), where Dinah was raped, and where Simeon and Levi slaughtered the inhabitants in revenge (Gen. 34:1-31). They received the curse of Jacob for their act (Gen. 49:5-7). Joseph's bones later were buried in this area (Josh. 24:32).

Shechem is mentioned in the inscription of Sesostris III (1878-43 B.C.) who claims to have conquered Sekmem.<sup>56</sup> It is mentioned in the Execration texts.<sup>57</sup>

First a German group before and after World War I, and later an American group led by G. Ernest Wright and others (1956-75) excavated this site that is today called Tell el-Balatah.<sup>58</sup> The tell is located at the east entrance of the pass between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal and is at the edge of Nablus which in Roman times was Flavia Neapolis founded by Vespasian in A.D. 72. The excavation revealed phases of occupation in the Middle Bronze and later periods. Walls and two city gates of the Hyksos period were found; but these are later than the period of the patriarchs.

### *Bethel and Ai*

Abraham's journey carried him south to a camping place on a mountain between Bethel and Ai where he built an altar (Gen. 12:8; 13:3, 4). Lot made his choice here to take the Jordan Valley (Gen. 13:2-12). Jacob, fleeing from Esau, spent the night at a place previously called Luz (cf. Judg. 1:23, 26), had a vision there, and then named the place Bethel (Gen. 28:19). At the Lord's command, he returned to Bethel after coming from Padan-aram (Gen. 35:1-15).

Beitin, thought to be the site of ancient Bethel, is 2,886 feet above sea level. It lies on the north-south road as well as on one of the east and west roads. Excavations were carried out here by Albright and Kelso.<sup>59</sup> The mountain east of Bethel (Gen. 12:8) may be El-Burj, located a half mile southeast of Beitin and commanding a view of the country. It had a hilltop sanctuary in the Middle Bronze Age. The city appears to have



been destroyed as the Egyptians pursued the Hyksos out of Egypt.

Et-Tell, located 1½ miles east-southeast of Beitin and thought to be Ai, was destroyed near 2300 B.C. and lay in ruins in Abraham's day. Excavations at Ai were by Judith Marquet-Krause and Joseph Callaway.<sup>60</sup>

Salem, thought to be Jerusalem, occurs in the Melchizedek story (Gen. 14:18). The "Urusalima" occurs in the Ebla texts.<sup>61</sup> It also appears in the Egyptian Execration texts, in the Amarna Letters, and in later Assyrian texts. Early Bronze Age sherds have found in the area as well as scarce sherds of the MB II.<sup>62</sup>

### *Bethlehem*

Rachel died in childbirth on the way to Ephrath which is identified with Bethlehem (cf. Gen. 35:19). Rachel's tomb is today commemorated by a structure built in 1841 which houses a cenotaph; but the site was mentioned by Origen and Eusebius, was visited by Benjamin of Tudela in the twelfth century,<sup>63</sup> and visited by travelers from the twelfth to eighteenth centuries. They indicate that the tomb was covered by eleven stones.<sup>64</sup> A mound with Bronze Age surface pottery exists east of the Church of the Nativity.<sup>65</sup>

### *Mamre and Hebron*

Following his separation from Lot, Abraham dwelt by the oaks of Mamre at Hebron (Gen. 13:18; 18:1) where he also built an altar. Here Abraham entertained angels (Gen. 18:1-15), pleaded for the sparing of Sodom (Gen. 18:22-33), and from here (or nearby) he saw the smoke of Sodom ascending (Gen. 19:27, 28). Isaac was at Mamre when Jacob returned from Padan-aram (Gen. 35:27). Mamre is thought to be Ramat el-Halil, 3,250 feet above the sea and 1 1/3 miles north of Hebron. Between 1926 and 1928, Evaristus Mader excavated in the enclosure built by Herod the Great, revealing ruins of a basilica built by Constantine about A.D. 330.<sup>66</sup> Josephus had described the terebinth here,<sup>67</sup> and later the historian Sozomen preserved a description of the place. The Pilgrim of Bordeaux in A.D. 333 described his visit there. Mamre is

marked on the Madaba mosaic map (A.D. 560-65).

Hebron, called Kiriath-arba, is the site of the cave of Machpelah which is the burial place of Sarah (Gen. 23:1-20) and Abraham (Gen. 25:10). Here Jacob's corpse was brought from Egypt for burial (Gen. 49:29-50:13). Herod the Great constructed a roofless enclosure which has sixty-foot-high walls to which later builders added rooftop crenellations. The largest ashlar are up to twenty-four feet long and 3½ high. The wall is six feet thick, the enclosure is 197 feet long and 111 wide, the corners are oriented north, east, west, and south, and the interior is paved with large paving stones. It is the only complete Herodian edifice which has survived until today. Josephus makes no mention of this building,<sup>68</sup> but both Josephus and the fourth-century Bordeaux pilgrim speak of memorial stones in the courtyard. The arrangement of the graves is first mentioned in Jubilees 36:21. The current structures within the enclosure are tenth to twelfth century, contain cenotaphs, and have been a mosque, a church, and again a mosque. A monk named Arnoul claims to have descended into the cave about A.D. 1119 and to have found bones which were later displayed about the country. Benjamin of Tudela claims to have descended and to have seen graves with inscriptions.<sup>69</sup> There are other travelers' reports.

Following the six-day war (1967), Moshe Dayan lowered a twelve-year-old girl named Michal, chosen because she was slender enough to descend through the eleven-inch shaft, into the cave, and she did measuring and photographing of a corridor and a room but found no relics.<sup>70</sup>

Excavation at Jebel er-Rumeideh which is across the valley from the haram revealed phases of occupation and a massive rampart from the Middle Bronze IIB period.<sup>71</sup> In 1986 a fragment of an early Babylonian tablet was found at Tell Rumeideh with a list of animals—sheep or goats—fit for sacrifice, and has three or four personal names.<sup>72</sup>

### *Gerar*

In Gerar, which appears to be the city of Abimelech (Gen. 21:22-32), Abraham said that Sarah, his wife, was his sister,



and Abimelech the king took Sarah (Gen. 20:1). Later, Isaac at the same place told the same story about Rebekah (Gen. 26:1-16).

Gerar conjecturally is identified with Tell Abu Hureireh (Tel Haror) on the road from Gaza to Beer-sheba about fifteen miles from Gaza and twelve from Beer-sheba.<sup>73</sup> The valley of Gerar is likely Wadi Esh-Shari'ah. There are potsherds of the Middle Bronze Age. The tell, surrounded by a rampart of beaten earth, covers thirty-five to forty acres. Gerar is currently being excavated.

### *Beer-sheba*

Hagar proceeded into the wilderness of Beer-sheba when sent from Abraham (Gen. 21:14-21). The name Beer-sheba is given two explanations in the book of Genesis. The first is from the oath made between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:25-33). Isaac and Abraham set out from there to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:1-19). Later, in the Isaac narrative the place is called Shibah (Gen. 26:33). Isaac, following a vision, built an altar there (Gen. 26:23-25). Jacob, before going to Egypt, came to Beer-sheba and offered sacrifices (Gen. 46:1-4). Beer-sheba is the name of a well, but is later specifically called a city ('*ir*'; Gen. 26:33).

Pre-historic sites have been excavated in the Beer-sheba area. Y. Aharoni's excavations at Tel Beer-sheba (1969-76) located two miles east of the modern city, though some areas were dug to bedrock, demonstrated to Aharoni's satisfaction that the city was built in the Iron Age I period (1250-1000) and was not inhabited in Abraham's day. A Hebrew sacrificial altar dating to the early days of the kingdom attests that Beer-sheba became a religious shrine. A well 130 feet deep outside the city wall dates in the transition period from the Bronze to Iron Age. While Genesis (Gen. 26:23, 24; 33, 34) alludes to wells at Beer-sheba, the evidence to connect those wells with this one is lacking. The present status of discussion of Beer-sheba presents conflicting theories: (1) Beer-sheba of Abraham's day lies at some site other than the one excavated—perhaps under the modern city. (2) The patriarchal stories reflect data of a later

period.<sup>74</sup> One should ask himself if the Genesis narrative of patriarchal stops requires the sort of strata archaeologists are looking for.<sup>75</sup>

### *Sodom and Gomorrah*

The book of Genesis mentions only Sodom and Gomorrah of the cities of the plain (Gen. 19:24, 25). To these two, Deuteronomy adds Admah and Zeboiim (Deut. 29:33). Then Josephus adds a fifth: "Vestiges of the divine fire and faint traces of five cities are still visible."<sup>76</sup> These cities, which became a symbol of overthrow (Is. 13:19), were apparently close to Zoar where Lot and his daughters sought temporary refuge (Gen. 13:10; 19:22, 30) before ascending the hills to live in a cave.

Many theories have been projected about these cities; however, their location has not been found.<sup>77</sup> Popular imagination has tended to identify the salt mountain at the southwest corner of the Dead Sea with the pillar that Lot's wife became (Gen. 19:26). Josephus says, "I have seen this pillar which remains to this day."<sup>78</sup> However, because of climatic conditions, the shapes of the pillars are continuously forming and changing.

### *Dothan*

Joseph set out from the area of Hebron seeking his brothers and came to Shechem some several miles away (Gen. 37:14). From Shechem he went further to the Dothan area and was there lowered in to a cistern before being sold. Tell Dothan was excavated by Joseph Free.<sup>79</sup> The area has numerous cisterns.

### *Dan*

Abraham pursued the invading kings as far as Dan (Gen. 14:14). The book of Judges (Judg. 18:27-29) informs us that the earlier name was Laish. Laish is mentioned in the Egyptian Execration texts, in the Mari texts,<sup>80</sup> and in the list of Thutmosis III. Excavations carried out on the site identified Dan by a bilingual Greek and Aramaic inscription of the third or second centuries B.C. and show that the site was already of importance in the Early Bronze Age.<sup>81</sup> Massive earthen ramparts of the MB II period have been excavated with a mud brick arched gateway.<sup>82</sup>



## CULTURE ITEMS

Archaeology should not be thought of as proving the Bible. Recognizing that many objects found in Syro-Palestinian, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian archaeology were used in many periods so that they have no dating value, still illustrative value can be claimed for them.<sup>83</sup>

Nahor in the Genesis story is the name of both a grandfather (Gen. 11:22) and a brother (Gen. 11:25, 27) of Abraham. Nakhur is also known to be the name of a city west of the Balikh River in the Haran area mentioned in the Mari texts. A woman asks her husband, "How long must I stay in Nakhur (Nahor)?"<sup>84</sup> Yet another place name in the area is Serug which was the name of Abraham's great-grandfather (Gen. 11:20-22).

### *Circumcision*

On an Egyptian stele of the twenty-third century B.C., a man records that he and 120 men have come through the rite of circumcision successfully.<sup>85</sup> Then a Sixth Dynasty scene from a Sakkarah tomb of Ankhma-Hor depicts the rite conducted on a youth by a mortuary priest. An accompanying text alludes to the accompanying pain.<sup>86</sup> Gen. 17:10-26 tells of the covenant of circumcision with Abraham. Jer. 9:25 alludes to Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, and Moab as those who are circumcised but yet uncircumcised. The Shechemites were uncircumcised (Gen. 34:14), but only the Philistines in the Old Testament are repeatedly reproached as uncircumcised (Judg. 14:3; 15:18; 1 Sam. 14:6; 17:26, 36; 31:4). A Megiddo ivory inlay from the Canaanite period depicts two circumcised captives of war.<sup>87</sup> A circumcised phallus was found at Gezer.<sup>88</sup>

### *The Seal and Cord*

Tamar required that Judah give her his signet, cord, and staff as a pledge before she agreed to sexual intercourse (Gen. 38:18). The items were not of intrinsic value but were personal items (like a modern ID card) whose ownership could not be disputed (Gen. 38:25). The signet was a cylinder seal drilled lengthwise to receive the cord by which it was suspended from the neck. Hundreds of these have been found in both Mesopotamia and Palestine. Each has its unique decoration and was

used to authenticate documents by impression. Nearly a hundred Early Bronze Age cylinder seals and seal impressions have been found on sites in Israel.<sup>89</sup>

### *Hebrew*

Students have long puzzled over what is meant by Abraham the Hebrew ('*ibhri*; Gen. 14:13; cf. 39:14; 41:12). The discovery of the Amarna tablets with their allusion to '*apiru* in the last century (though the tablets date later than the patriarchs) was thought to cast light on the questions. These cuneiform letters were written by vassal kings of Canaan and western Asia to the Egyptian Pharaoh. They reflect a confused political situation characterized by plot and counterplot and conflicting accusations in the Late Bronze Age. The '*apiru* appear not to be an ethnic group but to be a shifting social class of people.

In other tablets the *habiru* are scattered through upper Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and Syro-Palestine. They seem to be people away from home with no single class or social status. They are of various ethnic groups. There seems to be no direct connection between these people and the biblical Hebrews.

Burial in the Middle Bronze Age may be illustrated by a tomb excavated at Jericho and now reconstructed in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem. Dozens of skeletons were buried in one cave with the previous bones pushed aside when a new burial was made. Also included were utensils and implements used in life: clay jars, jewelry, scarabs, bronze weapons, wooden objects, and reed mats. There were wooden tables of a single plank on three legs and square wooden stools, a wooden bed, carved wooden bowls, and toilet boxes decorated with bone inlays.<sup>90</sup>

Tombs excavated at Jebel Qa'aqir and Sasa have animal bones from MB I and MB II. Sheep and goats dominate, but there are also cattle.<sup>91</sup> Some MB tombs have been found in the area of Jerusalem and at other sites about the country.

### *Hittites*

A hundred years ago, all that was known of the Hittites was learned from Scripture references. Now the Hittites are well-known from excavations at Boghazkoy in Turkey, one hun-



dred miles east of Ankara, from texts found there which have been deciphered and from objects found in Palestinian excavations.<sup>92</sup>

Ramparts (formerly explained as Hyksos) surrounding the cities are now thought to be cultural developments of the necessities of the times in Syro-Palestine.<sup>93</sup> Fortifications are not mentioned in Genesis.

Faced with a famine, Abraham goes down to Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20). In the Old Testament and New Testament, one regularly goes down to Egypt and the return is "going up." The idioms fit the geographical elevations.

Camels are not only included among Abraham's livestock (Gen. 12:16) but ten of them form the mode of transportation of Abraham's servant going to the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia to seek a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:10, 11, 19, 22, 44) as well as for Rebekah's and her maids' mounts on the return (Gen. 24:61, 63, 64). Jacob acquired camels among his livestock while with Laban (Gen. 30:43; 31:17), Rachel hid the teraphim in the camel's saddle (Gen. 31:34), and the Ishmaelites who carried Joseph to Egypt had camels in the caravan (Gen. 37:25).

The date of the domestication of the camel has not only been a crucial question in the date of the patriarchal material but also has its influence in Albright's claim that Abraham was a donkey caravanner. Albright thought the available evidence pointed to domestication at the end of the Bronze Age.<sup>94</sup> As late as 1987 William Dever continued setting the domestication of the camel at about 1200 B.C.<sup>95</sup> John Van Seters argues for an even later date in the Iron Age.<sup>96</sup>

From procedures now followed, it would appear that early archaeologists neglected adequate attention to animal bones. No one will ever know how many camel bones were thrown out without identification; however, a camel hair rope from the Fayum dates probably to the Fourth Dynasty. A stylized head of a camel found at Maadi and a drawing of what appears to be a dromedary are Predynastic. Middle Bronze Age camel bones have been found in Palestine at Gezer, Megiddo, and Taanach, and Late Bronze Age ones at Tell Jemmeh.<sup>97</sup>

Evidence for domestication in Mesopotamia has also been

accumulating. The camel is in a Sumerian lexical text from Ugarit,<sup>98</sup> and camel's milk occurs in a Sumerian text from Nippur dating in the Old Babylonian period.<sup>99</sup> Andre Parrot reported finding camel bones in Mari at a level dated in the middle of the third millennium, finding a large fragmented jar dating at the beginning of the second millennium which depicted the hindquarters of a camel, and he concluded that camels were a part of the patriarchal corral.<sup>100</sup> Whereas R. D. Barnett considers that the cylinder seal of the eighteenth century in the Walters Art Gallery depicting a pair of figures riding on a two-humped camel vindicates the Genesis traditions rendering them fully plausible.<sup>101</sup> H. Keith Beebe in a recent study rejects all the above as evidence for domestication and argues from the silence of texts for domestication (as contrasted with wild camels) in the Late Bronze Age.<sup>102</sup> However, all in all, it would appear that the time for "camel swallowing," if not already overdue, is approaching.

The horse plays no prominent role in the book of Genesis. Horses are included in the livestock the Egyptians trade to Joseph for bread (Gen. 47:17). One assumes that Joseph's chariot (Gen. 41:43; 46:29; 50:9) was pulled by horses. Horsemen were included in the procession taking Jacob's body for burial (Gen. 50:9). Jacob in his blessing alludes to the viper biting the horse's heels so that the rider falls backward (Gen. 49:17). Despite the lack of specific evidence, it is customary to attribute the introduction into Egypt of the horse to the Hyksos invaders.<sup>103</sup> F. Petrie and his successors in the excavation of Tell el-'Ajjul near Gaza found Bronze Age horse bits with cheek plates and also found buried bones of horses. It was conjectured that the bones represent horse sacrifices and that animals would have to be around a long time before they would be sacrificed.<sup>104</sup>

In contrast with the scarcity of the horse, the donkey is a common beast of burden with male and female donkeys included in Abraham's livestock (Gen. 12:16). The donkey was used by Abraham when going to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:3, 5). Donkeys were acquisitions in Jacob's holdings in Haran (Gen. 30:43), were possessions of Zibeon, a descendant of Esau (Gen.



36:24), and Jacob's sons carried burdens to Egypt on donkeys (Gen. 42:26, 27; 45:23). In Egypt, donkeys were traded for bread (Gen. 47:17), and finally, Issachar in Jacob's blessing is compared to a strong donkey (Gen. 49:14). The donkey is often depicted in Egyptian art, including the animals of the Semites of the Beni-Hasan tomb painting. Also a stele from Serabit el Khadim from the nineteenth century B.C. shows "the brother of the ruler of the land of Retenu" riding a donkey led by a servant and followed by another man with a stick.<sup>105</sup>

Many examples of small items of the Bronze Age have been found. The sword is mentioned in Gen. 3:24; 27:40; 31:26; 34:25; and 48:22. Swords are found in tombs with blades twelve to fifteen inches in length. In Syria and Palestine the "duck bill" axe which has oblong eyes developed in the nineteenth century B.C. The Beni Hasan people have one. The bow in which Ishmael became expert (Gen. 21:20), and the quiver and bow with which Esau hunted his game (Gen. 27:3) may have been like the bow carried in the Beni Hasan picture. Also, an Egyptian tomb painting of the Middle Kingdom at Meir in Egypt shows an archer with a bent long bow and additional arrows ready in his right hand.<sup>106</sup>

Egyptian art of the fifteenth century depicts gold rings being weighed as Abraham weighed out "money current among the merchants" for the cave of Machpelah. Coined money did not become current until the Persian period.<sup>107</sup> The shekel means simply a weight and the word need not be included in Hebrew in such a sum as "1000 silver" (cf. Gen. 20:16). Some weights have been found with the letter *shin* on them and are thought to be shekels. The *kesitah* (cf. Gen. 33:19) seems an archaic weight, but the exact value is unknown. The *beka'* (Gen. 24:22) is one-half a shekel. Seven examples with the word written have been found.

For musical instruments, Genesis mentions the *kinnor* and 'ughabh (Gen. 4:21). The Beni Hasan tomb depicts a lyre. An ivory from Megiddo (twelfth century) shows a musician playing before a king,<sup>108</sup> and a vessel (eleventh century) from Megiddo shows a musician walking among animals.<sup>109</sup>

The water bottle given to Hagar when she left Abraham's

encampment (Gen. 21:14, 15) was likely a skin container comparable to that displayed over the shoulder of an armed man in a tomb of the Twelfth Dynasty at Meir or that on the back of a Semite in the Beni Hasan tomb painting.<sup>110</sup>

## CONCLUSION

These various items which have been mentioned are only a sampling of the richness of the archaeological contribution to the interpretation of the Genesis stories. Others equally, or more important, have been passed over because of lack of time and space. The excavation of Syro-Palestine is not yet completed; no one knows what the future will offer. It is well to keep in mind that archaeological interpretations are subject to continuous revision as method is refined and additional data comes to light.

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Major Publications and Tools for Study* (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1975), 152-53.

<sup>2</sup>Gen. 1:18-21; 3:11-14; 22:13-15; 23:17-19; 24:22-24.

<sup>3</sup>Gen. 19:27, 28; 36:6, 35-37.

<sup>4</sup>A paraphrase of Gen. 32:25-32.

<sup>5</sup>Gen. 6:13-21; 10:6, 20.

<sup>6</sup>Gen. 17:12-19.

<sup>7</sup>E. Ulrich, "The Biblical Scrolls from Qumran Cave 4: An Overview and a Progress Report on Their Publication," *Revue de Qumran* 14 (December 1989): 209.

<sup>8</sup>Gen. 46:7-11.

<sup>9</sup>Gen. 32:4, 5, 30; 32:33—33:1; 34:5-7; 34:30—35:1, 4-7.

<sup>10</sup>Gen. 35:6-10; 36:5-12.

<sup>11</sup>Henry A. Sanders and Carl Schmidt, *The Minor Prophets in the Freer Collection and the Berlin Fragment of Genesis* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927), 233-430.

<sup>12</sup>F. G. Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri* (London: Emery Walker, 1934, 1935, 1936), Fasciculus IV, 1-3.

<sup>13</sup>R. Kasser, ed., *Papyrus Bodmer III. Evangile de Jean et Genese I-IV, 2 en Bohairique* (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1958), 49-52.

<sup>14</sup>Alejandro Diez Macho, *Neophyti I. Tomo I. Genesis* (Madrid-Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968), 643 pp.



<sup>15</sup>M. L. Klein, "A Geniza Fragment of Palestinian Targum to Gen. 15:1-4," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 49 (1978): 73-87.

<sup>16</sup>Nahman Avigad and Yigael Yadin, *A Genesis Apocryphon* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press of the Hebrew University, 1956), 48 pp.

<sup>17</sup>William F. Shea, "Two Palestinian Segments from the Eblaite Geographical Atlas," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, ed., Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (Philadelphia: Eisenbruans for the American Schools of Oriental Research, 1983), 589-612.

<sup>18</sup>G. Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 244.

<sup>19</sup>A. Goetze and S. Levy, "Fragment of the Gilgamesh Epic from Megiddo," *Atiqot* 2 (1959): 121-28.

<sup>20</sup>R. Amiran, "The Fall of the Early Bronze Age II City of Arad," *Israel Exploration Journal* 36 (1986): 74-76.

<sup>21</sup>William G. Dever, "The Middle Bronze Age: The Zenith of the Urban Canaanite Era," *Biblical Archaeologist* 50 (September 1987): 151, 153.

<sup>22</sup>B. Landsberger and H. Tadmor, "Fragments of Clay Liver Models From Hazor," *Israel Exploration Journal* 14 (1964): 201-18; Y. Yadin, *Hazor II* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press of the Hebrew University, 1960), 115.

<sup>23</sup>Joe D. Segar, "The Gezer Jar Signs: New Evidence of the Earliest Alphabet," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, ed., Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (Philadelphia: Eisenbruans for the American Schools of Oriental Research, 1983), 477-95.

<sup>24</sup>Dever, 165.

<sup>25</sup>Nelson Glueck, "The Age of Abraham in the Negeb," *Biblical Archaeologist* 18 (February 1955): 2-9; "Further Excavations in the Negeb," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 179 (October 1965): 6-29.

<sup>26</sup>W. F. Albright, "Abraham the Hebrew, A New Archaeological Interpretation," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 163 (October 1961): 39; "From the Patriarchs to Moses," *Biblical Archaeologist* 36 (February 1973): 17.

<sup>27</sup>S. Yeivin, "The Patriarchs in the Land of Canaan," in *The World History of the Jewish People, Patriarchs*, ed. B. Mazar (Israel: Jewish History Publications, 1970), 2:203.

<sup>28</sup>C. H. Gordon, *Introduction to Old Testament Times* (Ventnor, N.J.: Ventnor Publishers, 1953), 103.

<sup>29</sup>T. L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 392 pp.; John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1978), 335 pp.

<sup>30</sup>J. E. Huesman, "Archaeology and Early Israel: The Scene Today," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (January 1975): 11.

<sup>31</sup>See the survey of the question by J. J. Bimson, "Archaeological Data and the Dating of the Patriarchs," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. D. J. Wiseman and A. R. Millard (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbruans, 1983), 53-89.

<sup>32</sup>J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. S. Black and A. Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 318-19.

<sup>33</sup>Critiques of the position taken by Thompson and Van Seters are found in Huesman, "Archaeology," and in J. T. Luke, "Abraham and the Iron Age: Reflections on the New Patriarchal Studies," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 4 (1977): 35-47.

<sup>34</sup>Gaalyah Cornfeld, *Archaeology of the Bible: Book by Book* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 18.

<sup>35</sup>D. J. Wiseman, "They Lived in Tents," *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies*, ed. G. A. Tuttle (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 195-200.

<sup>36</sup>R. de Vaux, "Method in the Study of Early Hebrew History," in *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*, ed. J. P. Hyatt (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1965), 15-29.

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<sup>38</sup>Trude Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982), 1.

<sup>39</sup>D. J. Wiseman, "Abraham Reassessed," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. D. J. Wiseman and A. R. Millard (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbruans, 1983), 149-51.

<sup>40</sup>James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 227 (hereafter cited as *ANET*<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>42</sup>Siegfried H. Horn, *Biblical Archaeology: A Generation of Discovery* (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1985), 35.

<sup>43</sup>*ANET*<sup>3</sup>, 230.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>45</sup>Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, trans. A. F. Rainey (London: Burns & Oates, 1966), 132-33.

<sup>46</sup>*ANET*<sup>3</sup>, 229; James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954), no. 3 (hereafter cited as *ANEP*<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>47</sup>W. H. Shea, "Artistic Balance Among the Beni Hasan Asiatics," *Biblical Archaeologist* 44 (Fall 1981): 219-28.

<sup>48</sup>Aharoni, 134-35.

<sup>49</sup>Jack M. Sasson, "The Earliest Mention of the Name 'Canaan,'" *Biblical Archaeologist* 47 (June 1984): 90.

<sup>50</sup>M. Dahood, "Ebla, Ugarit, and the Bible," in G. Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 272.

<sup>51</sup>Josephus, *Ant.* 1.7.2 [159-60].

<sup>52</sup>P. Matthiae, *Ebla, An Empire Recovered* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 180.

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<sup>54</sup>Wayne T. Pitard, *Ancient Damascus* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbruans, 1987), 230 pp.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 39-41.

<sup>56</sup>*ANET*<sup>3</sup>, 230.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 329, n. 9.

<sup>58</sup>G. E. Wright, "Shechem," in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. M. Avi-Yonah (Jerusalem: Masada Press, 1976), 4:1083-94.

<sup>59</sup>J. L. Kelso, "Bethel," in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. M. Avi-Yonah (Jerusalem: Masada Press, 1976), 1:190-93.

<sup>60</sup>J. A. Callaway, "Ai," in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. M. Avi-Yonah (Jerusalem: Masada Press, 1976), 1:36-52.

<sup>61</sup>Matthiae, 181.

<sup>62</sup>W. Harold Mare, *The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987), 20; B. Mazar, "Jerusalem," in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. M. Avi-Yonah (Jerusalem: Masada Press, 1976), 2:580-91.

<sup>63</sup>*The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, trans. M. N. Adler (London: 1907; reprint, New York: Philip Feldheim, n.d.), 25.

<sup>64</sup>M. Avi-Yonah and A. Malamat, eds., *The World of the Bible* (Yonkers, N.Y.: Educational Heritage, 1964), 1:93.

<sup>65</sup>M. Avi-Yonah, "Bethlehem," in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. M. Avi-Yonah (Jerusalem: Masada Press, 1976), 1:200.

<sup>66</sup>S. Appelbaum, "Mamre," in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. M. Avi-Yonah (Jerusalem: Masada Press, 1976), 3:776-78.

<sup>67</sup>Josephus *Wars of the Jews* 4.9.7 [533]: "At a distance of six furlongs from the town there is also shown a large terebinth-tree, which is said to have stood there ever since the creation."

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, [532].

<sup>69</sup>*The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, 25.

<sup>70</sup>Nancy Miller, "Patriarchal Burial Site Explored for First Time in 700 Years," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 11 (May/June 1985): 26-43.

<sup>71</sup>P. C. Hammond, "Hebron," *Revue Biblique* 72 (April 1965): 267; "Hebron," 73 (October 1966): 566; "Hebron," 75 (April 1968): 253-58.

<sup>72</sup>A. Ofer, "Tell Rumeideh (Hebron)—1986," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 6 (1987/88): 93.

<sup>73</sup>Y. Aharoni, *The Archaeology of the Land of Israel*, trans. Anson F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 102; "The Land of Gerar," *Israel Exploration Journal* 6 (1956), 26-32.

<sup>74</sup>Y. Aharoni, "Nothing Early and Nothing Late: Re-writing Israel's Conquest," *Biblical Archaeologist* 39 (May 1976): 55-76.

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<sup>76</sup>Josephus *Wars* 4.8.4 [483]; *Antiquities* 1.11.4 [202-4].

<sup>77</sup>W. C. van Hattum, "Once Again: Sodom and Gomorrah," *Biblical Archaeologist* 44 (Spring 1981): 87-92.

<sup>78</sup>Josephus *Antiquities* 1.11.4 [203].

<sup>79</sup>D. Ussishkin, "Dothan," in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. M. Avi-Yonah (Jerusalem: Masada Press, 1976), 1:317-39.

<sup>80</sup>A. Malamat, "Syro-Palestinian Destinations in a Mari Tin Inventory," *Israel Exploration Journal* 21 (1971): 31-38.

<sup>81</sup>A. Biran, "To the God Who Is in Dan," in *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times*, ed. A. Biran (Jerusalem: Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, 1981), 142-51.

<sup>82</sup>A. Biran, "The Discovery of the Middle Bronze Age Gate at Dan," *Biblical Archaeologist* 44 (Summer 1981): 139-44; "The Triple-Arched Gate of Laish at Tel Dan," *Israel Exploration Journal* 34 (1984): 1-19.

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<sup>85</sup>*ANET*<sup>3</sup>, 326.

<sup>86</sup>*ANEP*, no. 629.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 332.

<sup>88</sup>W. G. Dever, ed., *Gezer IV* (Jerusalem: Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, 1985), 115.

<sup>89</sup>A. Ben-Tor, "Cult Scenes on Early Bronze Age Cylinder Seal Impressions," in *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times*, ed. A. Biran (Jerusalem: Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, 1981), 61.

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<sup>91</sup>L. K. Horwitz, "Animal Offerings From Two Middle Bronze Age Tombs," *Israel Exploration Journal* 37 (1987): 251-55.

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<sup>94</sup>W. F. Albright, "Abraham the Hebrew, A New Archaeological Interpretation," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental*



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<sup>95</sup>William Dever, "The Middle Bronze Age: The Zenith of the Urban Canaanite Era," *Biblical Archaeologist* 50 (September 1981): 160.

<sup>96</sup>Van Seters, 17.

<sup>97</sup>Joseph Free, "Abraham's Camels," *Journal of the Near Eastern Society* 3 (July 1944): 187-93; Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1976), 196, 202-3; Frederick E. Zeuner, *A History of Domesticated Animals* (New York: Harper, 1963), 345-47.

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<sup>100</sup>Andre Parrot, *Abraham and His Times* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 100-101.

<sup>101</sup>R. D. Barnett, "Lachish, Ashkelon, and the Camel: A Discussion of Its Use in Southern Palestine," in *Palestine and the Bronze and Iron Ages*, ed. J. H. Tubbs (London: University of London Institute of Archaeology, 1985), 18-20.

<sup>102</sup>H. Keith Beebe, *The Dromedary Revolution*, Occasional Papers, no. 18 (Claremont: The Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, May 1990), 44 pp.

<sup>103</sup>Jean Yoyotte, "Horse," in *A Dictionary of Egyptian Civilization*, ed. Georges Posener (London: Methuen and Co., 1962), 127-29. See the survey of A. R. Millard, "The Patriarchal Narratives," 43-44.

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<sup>105</sup>Avi-Yonah and Malamat, eds., *The World of the Bible*, 1:66.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:64.

<sup>107</sup>M. Avi-Yonah, *Our Living Bible* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1962), 29.

<sup>108</sup>*ANEP*, no. 332.

<sup>109</sup>S. M. Paul and W. G. Dever, eds., *Biblical Archaeology* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., [1975] 1974), 246.

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# THEOLOGICAL THEMES IN GENESIS



## THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ON GENESIS: HOW TO GET AT THE THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE OF THE BOOK

Rick R. Marrs

In recent years we have become increasingly aware of the difficulties involved in interpreting a passage of Scripture. We have become sensitized to the dynamics of translating the ancient languages into contemporary parlance, the difficulties of bridging the historical and cultural gap between the ancient text and our modern world, and our ever present personal presuppositions and preconceptions which may impede an accurate hearing of the Word. Attempting to think theologically about a portion of Scripture may magnify these phenomena, for we are quickly reminded of the infrequency with which we think first and foremost about the theological significance of much of the biblical material.

To get at the theological message of a biblical book involves travel along a two-way street. Whereas we are most accustomed to travel one way (i.e., moving from one isolated passage to the next), thinking theologically demands that we often move in two directions (i.e., from the more general concerns back to the specific issues). To change the metaphor, we might suggest that to think theologically about Genesis demands that we consider the "big picture," i.e., the theme and motifs that center the book and cause it to cohere. Such an approach will then require us to return to familiar passages, known initially as isolated units, and reread them for a sense of their place and function in the larger sweep and movement of the book.

Getting at the theological message of Genesis demands that certain questions be asked. What do these materials affirm about the nature, action, and essence of God? What do they say about what it means to be human? What is the relation between



God and humanity? Between God and the rest of his creation? Between humanity and creation? The raising of such questions forces us to remain focused upon the central message and thrust of the materials before us.

Thinking theologically about Genesis demands that we first have a sense of the overall framework and movement of the book. Although numerous outlines for the book have been suggested, W. Brueggemann<sup>1</sup> has recently offered a thematic outline of the book that is quite suggestive for theological reflection.

Clearly, the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) is the centerpiece of the book. However, Brueggemann uses this motif as a structuring device for the rest of the major blocks of material. Genesis 12—25 (the Abraham narrative) he entitles “The Embraced Call of God,” suggesting that the thematic thread which intertwines the various narrative units is the question of Abraham’s embracing of God’s call or distancing himself from it. The question repeatedly raised is whether Abraham will live by faith. In Genesis 26—36 (the Jacob narrative) the call remains central, but the focus shifts. Here the theme entails “The Conflicted Call of God.” The thematic thread that interlaces the various narratives is the conflict that is ever present in the life of Jacob, and the reason(s) for that conflict (i.e., whether the conflict is “self-inflicted” or unavoidable). In Genesis 37—50 (the Joseph narrative) the call of God remains center stage, but again the angle from which it is viewed shifts. In these narratives the promise and presence of God seem strangely “silent.” This section Brueggemann entitles “The Hidden Call of God.” Theologically, the issue of providence is at the core of the accounts dealing with Joseph.

Genesis 1—11 remains. Against the backdrop of the patriarchal narratives, Genesis 1—11 Brueggemann fittingly entitles “The Sovereign Call of God.” Clearly, in the opening panoramic sweep of Genesis 1 we see God’s clear intent and design for his creation. We are caught up in his purposes for his creation and his understanding of the relationship between himself and his creatures. However, we are quickly plunged into a series of narratives relating the mixed ways in which his

creation (specifically, humanity) responds to these purposes. Throughout the accounts of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, and the Tower of Babel, we are invited to interact with “The Sovereign Call of God” and our response to that call. Such a reading of the material is ultimately the only legitimate approach, for to read Scripture theologically ultimately demands that we hear within the Word God’s call to us and claim upon our lives, that we see in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph our own lives, that in the various responses of God’s creatures to his design and intent for his creation, we be challenged to reassess our own (mis)alignment to his will and way for our lives.

### ABRAHAM: EMBRACING THE CALL

Viewing the narratives involving Abraham from the perspective of a call/promise embraced opens new vistas for fresh reflection upon familiar passages. Theologically, several of the accounts involving Abraham can be categorized as narratives in which Abraham either embraces the call (faith) or distances himself from the promise (fear). The call and promise to Abraham is introduced in Genesis 12 and reiterated in Genesis 15; 17. The call rings out:

Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.

The Lord’s complete commitment to these promises is affirmed in Genesis 15 (God makes himself totally vulnerable to the promise by moving between the sacrifices); Abraham’s acceptance of the promise is invoked in Genesis 17 (the sign of circumcision indicating commitment to the promise and plan of God). The call of God demands response. Will Abraham embrace this promise or distance himself from it? Genesis 12—25 is replete with narratives demonstrating the patriarch’s



willingness to entrust himself to the promise of God. Leaving the security, stability, and community of his homeland, he ventures forth toward an unknown land with a barren wife. Repeatedly, Abraham embraces the promise. In this new land we see him willingly erect altars, thereby claiming this land for his God. His confidence in God as provider and promise keeper shines forth in his willingness to allow Lot to have first choice of this "Promised Land." Later, when Lot (who sees with only human eyes) is taken hostage, Abraham unhesitatingly comes to his rescue. However, Abraham refuses any reward for such a deed, eliminating any possible suggestion that he has been enriched by anyone other than his own true God. (A similar motif is present in the purchase of the cave of Machpelah as a burial site for Sarah.) Truly, Abraham as embracer of the promise of God understands the proper relationship between himself and God and thus is deservedly designated as being in "right relationship" (i.e., righteous).

Conversely, the Abraham story reminds us that embracing the call and promise of God is never easy nor conclusive. No sooner does Abraham arrive in this "Promised Land" than famine breaks out, forcing his departure. A crisis of faith surfaces. Can this God of promise secure the promise in a foreign land? Unsure, Abraham distances himself from the promise through the duplicitous language he imposes upon Sarah. Strikingly, Abraham, the supposed bearer of the blessings of God, in both instances (i.e., Genesis 12; 20) brings those in contact with him nearer curse than blessing! Further, Abraham, saddled with a barren wife, attempts to "help" God realize the fulfillment of the promise of numerous progeny, first through the proposed adoption of his house servant Eliezer, and then through the birth of Ishmael to Hagar. However, in each instance Abraham is shown that the power of this promising God transcends regional boundaries and human limitations.

Perhaps the focal point at which these themes most clearly and decisively coalesce is in Genesis 22 (the sacrifice of Isaac). Abraham, repeatedly an altar builder, is now asked to build an altar upon which the visible realization of the long awaited

promise will be sacrificed. Surely the promise was never more in jeopardy! Abraham, unflinchingly devoted to the promise and call of his Lord, moves forward, simply yet eloquently expressing for us the heart of the theology under which he now lives his life—"the Lord will provide" (Gen. 22:8, 14). Abraham in his journey of faith has come to see most clearly that the promising call of God is a sheer manifestation of the gift of a gracious and all-powerful God to whom he can wholeheartedly entrust himself.

### JACOB: THE CALL BRINGS CONFLICT

When we turn to the narratives involving Jacob, we are immediately struck with the element of conflict which permeates the several accounts. Conflict is at the center of Jacob's relationship with Esau (his brother), with Laban (his uncle/father-in-law), and (some would suggest) ultimately with his God. Such a predominance of conflict causes us to question its source and cause. We again are struck with the (perhaps) implicit contrast between Jacob and his forefather Abraham. Whereas Abraham realized that the promise and blessing of God were sheer gifts and *received* them, Jacob is a *grasper* from the outset. At times his grasping even involves deception (thereby fulfilling his name). Although clearly at the outset Esau manifests boorish behavior and a complete disdain for the promises and blessings of God, Jacob refuses to let God's beneficent grace run its course. Rather he reaches out and seizes what he so desperately desires. Such grasping and deception forces his exodus from the "Promised Land," causing us to wonder if the promises of God can once again transcend regional boundaries and human frailties. Poignantly, Jacob's dream at Bethel shows us the promise bearer at a crucial crossroads. The land of promise behind him, the old country of pre-promise before him, Jacob's life is intersected from a third direction—the presence and promise of his God.

Upon arriving in the land of his forebears, Jacob again encounters deception and conflict, although this time apparently not of his own doing. Although Laban unwittingly



attempts repeatedly to thwart the plan and purpose of God, we see dramatically that God's intent and power to bless and fulfill his promise supersede human machinations. However, a haunting question lingers: Will the heir of the promise remain exiled from the land of the promise? Dramatically, difficulties are encountered at both ends of the journey as the promise bearer determines to return home to his father. Having successfully escaped the greedy clutches of his father-in-law, Jacob fearfully anticipates the reception by his estranged brother. Amazingly, upon his arrival Jacob the trickster encounters Esau the *brother*, a brother who has allowed his animosity to give way to forgiveness and reconciliation.

If the sacrifice of Isaac captures the thematic essence of the Abraham narratives, Jacob's enigmatic wrestling match at the Jabbok may encapsulate the essence of the Jacob narratives. As he nears re-entrance into the "Promised Land," Jacob finally becomes acutely aware of the source of his blessings. However, even in this final awakening, Jacob engages in his ultimate struggle—a struggle with God himself. Refusing surrender, Jacob to the end demands both blessing and control through knowledge of his adversary's name. Although the blessing is received, it is in some respects a Pyrrhic victory, for the bearer of the blessing limps home crippled. A man whose life was encircled with conflict is given a new name to reflect such reality—Israel.

Later Israel surely heard in these ancient narratives of her ancestor Jacob a telling account of her own relationship with God. She could not but realize the dramatically qualitative difference in a life given to deception and grasping, in contrast to a life receptively open to the gracious calling and giving of an all loving God. Israel, like Jacob before her, had to relearn repeatedly—the stronger the tendency to grasp and force the hand of God, the more prevalent the conflict in one's relationships with others and with God himself.

### JOSEPH: THE HIDDEN CALL

Viewing the narratives concerning Joseph allows us to see

the call from yet a third perspective. It is most striking that God, who has been virtually omnipresent throughout the lives of Abraham and Jacob, suddenly seems absent from the life of Joseph. If we read the adventure of Joseph as if the ending is unknown, the story becomes a catena of potential wrong endings. Joseph, the spoiled child of a doting father, becomes the victim of his brothers' jealousy. However, the pit into which he is thrown fails to become a tomb; rather, he is released only to be sold into Egyptian slavery! Making the best of a bad situation, Joseph rises to a position of responsibility within his master Potiphar's house, only again to be victimized (this time innocently) by the scheming desire of the mistress of the house. Now imprisoned, Joseph again makes the best of a miserable situation and rises to a position of responsibility within the prison. Through Joseph's ability to interpret dreams, we are given a glimmer of hope for change in the future; however, we wonder whether his future can really be entrusted to the faulty memory of a royal cupbearer. Again, through the interpretation of dreams, Joseph eventually rises to phenomenal prominence in the land of Egypt, becoming vizier in charge of collection and distribution of food supplies. Again he must confront his brothers, although this time the bases of power from which each party operates is dramatically reversed. Haunting questions refuse to be silenced. Will revenge and retaliation be the order of the day? Where is God in all of this activity? What has happened to the call and promise of God during this period?

Surely two intertwined themes force themselves upon us. On the one hand, the apparent "hiddenness" of God throughout demands attention. Further, like the reunion of Jacob and Esau, the question of whether revenge or reconciliation will prevail demands resolution. Perhaps the only aspect more striking than the apparent "absence" of God is a recognition of those places where God is mentioned. God is regularly on the lips of Joseph, who consistently refuses credit for his ability to interpret dreams. Rather, like Abraham who steadfastly attributes his possessions to an all giving God, Joseph stresses that his interpretations are solely gifts given him by his God. As we follow the roller coaster ride of Joseph's life, it is of para-



mount importance to note that the *one time* at which the presence of God in Joseph's life is mentioned occurs when he is plunged into an Egyptian prison! Poignantly, precisely when we might (mistakenly) assume that Joseph is bereft of God, God's presence is specifically affirmed!

This theme of the hiddenness (providence) of God leads naturally into the second theme of revenge versus reconciliation. Two passages are of central importance.

"And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. . . . And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. *So it was not you who sent me here, but God*; and he made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:5, 7, 8; emphasis mine).

"Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, *you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good*, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he reassured them and comforted them (Gen. 50:19-21; emphasis mine).

In these passages Joseph demonstrates a clear awareness of the presence and purpose of God in his life. Reviewing the former days of his life, Joseph (with eyes of faith) can see the plan and purpose of God. Although human forces and machinations may at times seem formidable and overwhelming, while the plan of God hangs precariously by the slimmest of threads, Joseph knows that the power and purpose of his Lord can overcome such seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Such is sometimes the life of faith and the nature of God in our world. When God may seem most absent, Scripture affirms for us that he is most present. When human caprice and injustice seem most insurmountable, faith enables us to see clearly the will and way of God in our past, allowing us to embrace confidently his call and promise as we move into the future.

## GENESIS 1—11: THE SOVEREIGN CALL OF GOD

Having seen God's gracious provision and beneficent care of Abraham and his descendents, we are drawn finally to the beginning of Genesis and driven to ask—what was God's original intent and purpose for his creation? What was creation's response to this intent? Will God bring his creation to the unity and purpose he intends?

Genesis 1 opens with a panoramic vision of an undefined mass that becomes an orderly and purposeful creation solely through the commanding speech of a sovereign Lord. God as King issues directives; a beautiful creation results. Having generated such majestic beauty with such little effort, this royal monarch rests enthroned over his creation. Most remarkably, he entrusts his magnificent work to that sole entity of creation fashioned in his own image—humankind! Created in the image of God, humanity is bestowed with dignity and responsibility. However, a question immediately forces itself upon us. How will humankind respond to this exalted status and bestowal of responsibility?

Genesis 2—11 treats this issue at great length. In Genesis 2, we are given a vision of God's intent for these humans he has created and their place and function within the larger created order. In Genesis 3—11 we see humanity's tragic response to this lofty position—rebellion! This all-powerful God has freely given himself to his creation; however, humanity finds itself frequently unable to entrust itself to this loving God. Being created in the image of God is heady stuff—these creatures find that always close at hand is the dangerous temptation to conclude that as humans, they possess or can acquire divine power and ability, making God unnecessary or irrelevant. Time and again, we see these creatures strive for equality with God, question God's motivation and intent for their lives, and play God! Such actions are unqualifiedly regarded as rebellion in Genesis 3—11. Not surprisingly, we see that such actions repeatedly plunge God's creation and human society into a whirlpool of tension and struggle for power (Genesis 3), chaos and violence (Genesis 6), and aimlessness and despair (Genesis 11). This God who wills to love and nurture is forced each time



to respond with loving punishment. Ultimately, rebellion becomes so pervasive that the Sovereign King returns his creation to its pre-created chaotic state, so that he may bring into being a new creation (Genesis 6—9). Tragically, the flood does not drown human desire and hubris, for even in the post-flood world anxiety concerning security and the drive for fame continues (Genesis 11).

However, clearly human rebellion and the attendant divine punishment is not the final word, for we have seen repeatedly that the God of Genesis is a sovereign Lord who wills in love to call a people into relationship and promises himself totally to that relationship. Appropriately, throughout Genesis 1—11 God returns to renew and reaffirm his commitment to these fickle and shortsighted creatures. Refreshingly, dotting the landscape are individuals who hear the call of this God and respond in obedient trust, acknowledging that this Sovereign God is not only Creator of life and wholeness, but sustainer as well. Such trust results in a relationship with God which is *right*.

### CONCLUSION

Although thinking theologically about Genesis may be somewhat daunting and imposing, hearing Genesis theologically is truly dangerous and life-threatening. To hear and think theologically about Genesis is to hear God's ancient Word as a word addressed not simply to ancient Israel, but ultimately as a Spirit-breathed Word addressed to us. To hear God's promising call to Abraham is to hear God's promising call to us, a call for us embodied in Jesus Christ. We cannot help but be reminded of those times in which we have faithfully embraced the call of God, or fearfully distanced ourselves from it. To see the conflict in which Jacob's life was embroiled dramatically forces us to consider our lives as anxious graspers or trusting recipients of God's grace. To trace Joseph's life invites us to re-examine our understanding of the hand of God in our own lives and our need to see life through the eyes of God rather than simply through human eyes. Only with such a vision can

reconciliation replace retaliation. As contemporary children of God, hearing God's sovereign call to his creation in Genesis 1—11 permits us to reconsider our place and function as images of God in a world given to rebellion against our loving Creator. Do we truly believe God as Lord knows and intends what is best for us as his creatures? Will we willingly align ourselves with this Sovereign King? Will we enter into such a relationship with him that he might designate "righteous"? Hearing Genesis theologically makes us keenly aware that such questions cannot be silenced; they demand response. To hear God's promising call and claim upon his creation and the ancient patriarchs is ultimately to hear God's promising call and claim upon us.

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>W. Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982).

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## GOD IN GENESIS

Jack P. Lewis

### THE NAMES OF GOD

The book of Genesis has a perplexing variety in divine names, the first of which to consider is *'el*.<sup>1</sup> The *'el*, singular in form, is a general appellative in Semitic languages meaning "god"; but it is also a proper name. The god El occupies a prominent place in the Canaanite pantheon known from Ugaritic texts. In Genesis, this term, a species designation, occurs as an appellative in place names like Bethel (Gen. 28:19) and Peniel (Gen. 32:30) and in personal names like Mehujael and Methushael (Gen. 4:18), Mahalalel (Gen. 5:12), Ishmael (Gen. 16:11), and Israel (Gen. 32:28). It then occurs as a proper name in *'el-'elohe-Israel* (Gen. 33:20) which in Greek is *Theos Israel*, in Latin *Fortissimum Deum Israhel*. The name is used by Jacob for an altar erected at Shechem and is transliterated from Hebrew into English. El is also one of the names of God occurring in several settings. God instructed Jacob to go to Bethel and make an altar to the God (*'el*) who appeared to him, and Jacob speaks of the God (*'el*) who answered him (Gen. 35:1, 2). God identifies himself as *'el* (Gen. 46:3), and Jacob speaks of the *'el* of your father (Gen. 49:25). These are all rendered "God" in English.

Several names beginning with *'el* are connected with sanctuaries or altars. Hagar called the name of the Lord *'el ro'i* (Gen. 16:13) which in Greek is *ho theos ho epidon me*, in Latin *Deus qui vidisti me*, and in English "The God who sees me." At Beersheba Abraham called on the name of *'adhonai 'el 'olam* which in Greek is *Theos aionios*, in Latin *Dei aeterni*, and in

English "the Everlasting God" (Gen. 21:33).

*'El 'elyon*, rendered in Greek as *theos ho hupistos*, in Latin as *Dei altissimi*, and in English as "God Most High," occurs in the Melchizedek story. Melchizedek is a priest of God Most High, he blesses Abraham by God Most High, and he blesses God Most High. Abraham swears by God Most High that he will not take anything from the king of Sodom (Gen. 14:18, 19, 20, 22).

*'El shaddai*, rendered in Greek as *ho theos sou/mou*, in Latin as *Deus omnipotens*, in the KJV as "Almighty God," but in twentieth-century translations as "God Almighty," is used in the Lord's addresses to Abraham (Gen. 17:1) and to Jacob (Gen. 35:11). The name is also used in invocations by Isaac (Gen. 28:3) and Jacob (Gen. 43:14). Jacob used it in his description of his Bethel experience (Gen. 48:3; cf. 49:25). By the writer of Genesis, all these *'el* names are considered names by which *Yahweh* was called in his various manifestations. *Elohim* is fully identified with *Yahweh*.

*'Elohim*,<sup>2</sup> corresponding to *theos* in Greek, to *Deus* in Latin, and "God" or "Deity" in English, is a common noun and not a proper name. The form is a plural for which there is no singular form.<sup>3</sup> It is ordinarily<sup>4</sup> used with a singular verb and should not be interpreted to convey either polytheistic or trinitarian ideas. It is conjectured to convey the idea of plentitude of power. *'Elohim* can be used for pagan gods as when Laban asks why Jacob has stolen his gods (Gen. 31:30, 32) or when Jacob's family put away their gods (Gen. 35:2-4). Elsewhere in the Old Testament it occurs in the expression "other Gods" (Josh. 24:2; 1 Kings 11:4) and also designates Baalzebub (2 Kings 1:6, 16) and Astarte (1 Kings 11:5). *'Elohim* with adjectival force lies back of the term "mighty prince" (Gen. 23:6; *nasi' 'elohim*), which describes Abraham's reputation in the Negeb, and "mighty wrestlings" (Gen. 30:8; *naphtule 'elohim*); it is disputed whether *ruach 'elohim* (Gen. 1:2) is adjectival as in the REB text and NRSV margin. The same expression is "spirit of God" in Gen. 41:38. From an early time, Christians have disputed the identity of the *bene 'elohim* (Gen. 6:2, 4) with some seeing them as divine beings and others as descendants of



Seth. The expression "God of heaven" (Gen. 24:7) occurs also in John 1:9 and in late texts (2 Chron. 36:23; Ezra 1:2; Neh. 1:4, 5; 2:4, 20).

*Yahweh* is 5,321 times in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> It is also found on the Moabite Stone from the ninth century B.C., on an eighth-century seal now in the Harvard Semitic Museum, on ostraca from Lachish, on an amulet from Jerusalem, in the Elephantine Papyri, and in other sources—all later than the patriarchal period. The name is explained in Ex. 3:13-15 as "I am that I am" or "I will be what I will be." Before the time of Christ, Jews developed a dread of pronouncing the name and substituted the vowels for the word *'adon*, giving the name *'adonai* which was written by the Masoretes into the manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> The Greek Bible had used *kurios*, and the Latin *Dominus*. The New Testament also used *kurios*. In the fifteenth century, scholars created the form *Jehovah*; that name was experimented with in the ASV (1901) but was abandoned by the RSV in favor of "Lord" earlier used in the KJV.

The book of Genesis traces the worship of *Yahweh* to the beginning of the race with people beginning to call on the name of the Lord in the days of Enosh (Gen. 4:26). *Yahweh* is described as the God of Shem (Gen. 9:26), Noah (Gen. 8:20), Abraham (Gen. 12:8), and Jacob (Gen. 26:25) all build altars to the Lord. There is no indication of worship being confined to one place or of there being a priestly class.

In critical scholarship, much has been made of Ex. 3:14, 15 and 6:2, 3 as implying that the name *Yahweh* was unknown before the time of Moses. Despite the widespread acceptance of this claim, it has been repeatedly pointed out the verse does not have the meaning attributed to it. Segal, for example, contends that the question is "What is the meaning of his name?" not "What is his name?"<sup>7</sup>

Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Noah (Gen. 6:9) walked with God. Abraham is called on to walk before the Lord and be blameless (Gen. 17:1). Jacob summarizes his varied fortunes: "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has led [*hara'eh*] me all my life long to this day" (Gen. 48:15). He also speaks of the Mighty One (*'abhir*) of Jacob and

uses the epithets "the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel" (Gen. 49:24). These statements suggest relationships above mere ceremonialism and are approximations to David's shepherd image (Psalm 23).

The term "Lord of Hosts," which occurs 279 times in the Old Testament and is common in the prophets, does not occur in Genesis though some interpreters have attempted to make a connection with God's host (*mahaneh*; Gen. 32:1, 2). Genesis has nothing about the god Baal or his consorts Astarte and Anath. Apart from the Melchizedek story, Jerusalem and Zion, centers of worship in the later monarchy, do not appear in Genesis.

From the time of H. B. Witter (1771) and J. Astruc (1684-1766), the fact that the book of Genesis has alternating sections in which one form of the divine name prevails has been noticed. The reader of English can demonstrate this phenomenon for himself if he will take three colored pencils and mark in a copy of Genesis the occurrences of "God," "Lord God," and "Lord" with different colors. He will notice that Gen. 1:1-2:4 uses "God" exclusively; 2:4-3:24 uses "Lord God"; 4:1-25 uses "Lord"; 5:1-6:1 uses "God"; and on the alternation goes. The usage is not totally consistent; *Elohim* turns up in Gen. 3:1, 3, 5 and in 4:25 in what are otherwise *Yahweh* sections. *Yahweh* occurs at Gen. 17:1 and 20:18 in what should be *Elohim* sections. These divergencies are attributed by critics to compilers. In Gen. 6:1-4 and 9:18-29, the names are mixed resulting in fragmentation of the story if assigned on this criteria to respective sources. In Gen. 7:16, a sentence would have to be divided in the middle. Fragmentation results also in Gen. 24:15-30:24.<sup>8</sup> The occurrence of the divine name becomes less in the latter part of Genesis from what it is in the first part.

The source critics have attempted to assign sections of Genesis to various sources or oral schools from the name used. A recent study lists this phenomenon as the most important clue that a plurality of sources lies behind Genesis 1-5.<sup>9</sup> Others, however, have insisted that theological motives determine the choice of the name with *Elohim* suggesting the work of creation and *Yahweh* the work of redemption. M. H. Segal sug-



tension with biblical passages attributing creation to God alone (Gen. 2:7, 22; Is. 40:13; 44:24). At any rate, the effort to find here a cryptic, primitive revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, despite its age, has little to commend itself. Such an idea has no clear trace in the Old Testament.

The God of Genesis is presented in anthropomorphic and anthropopathic terms. How else could people understand? Communication comes through comparison. God is always presented in masculine terms. People are made in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:27; 5:1; 9:6). God formed woman from one of the man's ribs (Gen. 2:21, 22). Woman is the glory of the man (1 Cor. 11:7). God plants a garden in Eden (Gen. 2:8, 28). God speaks, sees, and walks in the garden (Genesis 3). He makes coats of skins (Gen. 3:21).

God has second thoughts (*nacham*) that he made man on the earth (Gen. 6:6). Old Testament writers are not hesitant to attribute change of mind to God (Judg. 2:18; 1 Sam. 15:35; Jer. 20:16; Joel 2:14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jon. 3:9; etc.) with a verb which is often used for man's actions. It, however, is a different verb from *shubh* which most often describes man's repentance. The Old Testament is explicit that God does not repent as man does (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Ps. 110:4).

The God of Genesis shuts Noah in the ark (Gen. 7:16). He is a God who remembers (Gen. 8:1; 9:15). He smelled the savor of Noah's sacrifice (Gen. 8:21). He is described as coming down to see about the building of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:5). Abraham is depicted as standing before the Lord (Gen. 18:22). In Jacob's dream of the ladder whose top reached to heaven, the Lord stood above the ladder (Gen. 28:13).

### THE GOD OF JUSTICE

While promising the land of Canaan which was occupied by other peoples, he did not take it from them in Abraham's day "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Gen. 15:16). Abraham can appeal to him: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right [*mishpat*]?" (Gen. 18:25). On this basis, the city of Sodom could be spared should ten righteous people be

found in it. God will judge Egypt (Gen. 15:14). He judges between people over wrongs and over treaties made (Gen. 16:5; 31:42, 53), and he punishes wickedness (Gen. 44:16).

He is a God of steadfast love (*chesedh*) and faithfulness (*'emeth*; Gen. 24:27). These are heavily loaded theological words which occur numerous times in other parts of the Old Testament. The word *chesedh* occurs in eleven Genesis passages. Lot recognizes the kindness of the men in saving his life (Gen. 19:19). The servant of Abraham prays that the Lord show steadfast love to Abraham (Gen. 24:12) specifying the sign by which he would know (Gen. 24:14), and he thanks the Lord when it has happened (Gen. 24:27). Jacob protests that he is unworthy of all of God's steadfast love shown him (Gen. 32:[11]10). *Chesedh* also designates the Lord's steadfast love to Joseph (Gen. 39:21). As a human trait, *chesedh* is involved when Abraham requests that in kindness Sarah will say that he is her brother (Gen. 20:13), Abimelech dealt loyally with Abraham (Gen. 21:23), Rebekah's family dealt kindly with Abraham's servant (Gen. 24:49), Joseph requests kindness from the Egyptian butler (Gen. 40:14), and Jacob when approaching death requests kindness of Joseph (Gen. 47:29).

A companion trait of the Lord's dealings, occurring in the pair *chesedh* and *'emeth*, is "faithfulness" mentioned both by Abraham's servant (Gen. 24:[26]27, 49) and by Jacob (Gen. 32:[11]10). Jacob requests the pair as a human trait of Joseph (Gen. 47:29). Otherwise the term *'emeth* occurs in Genesis only as an adjective—"right way" (Gen. 24:48).

Yet another term used for both man and God is *chanan* (to grant favor). God graciously has granted Jacob the children (Gen. 33:5) Jacob displays to Esau. Jacob utters the invocation on Benjamin, "God be gracious to you, my son!" (Gen. 43:29). The same root *chanan* is used in a reflexive form in reporting Joseph's pleading with his brothers not to mistreat him (Gen. 42:21). The noun *chen* from this root is also used for both people and God. Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). But then the term is most often used in polite address. Abraham pleads with the three men, "If I have found favor" (Gen. 18:3), Lot with the angels (Gen. 19:19), Laban



with Jacob (Gen. 30:27), Jacob with Esau (Gen. 33:10), the Egyptians when offering to be slaves in exchange for food (Gen. 47:25), Jacob with Joseph that he not be buried in Egypt (Gen. 47:29), and Joseph with the Egyptians about burial (Gen. 50:4). Jacob's gift to Esau was sent to find favor (Gen. 32:[6]5; 33:8), Esau asked to leave some men with Jacob (Gen. 33:15), Shechem sought favor of Jacob (Gen. 34:11), and Joseph found favor in Potiphar's eyes (Gen. 39:4) and with the keeper of the prison (Gen. 39:21).

### THE SEVERITY OF GOD

The writer of Genesis depicts God from the beginning as a God who demands strict obedience and who severely punishes disobedience. Genesis expounds the idea man has free choice (Gen. 3:2, 3, 11; 4:9-15; 6:3, 14). The God of Genesis is a God of justice. Though providing a garden of delight, the Lord makes rules that are plain and severe: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen. 2:16, 17). Once disobedient, Adam was afraid of God for the first time.

The Lord was as good as his word. The serpent was cursed (Gen. 3:14, 15); the woman received her fate; and Adam now had cursed ground to work until he returned to the ground from which he had been taken. Driven from the garden, Adam was separated from the tree of life; God guarded the access by cherubim with a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24).

No less stern is the Lord with Cain who had killed his brother. Cain was a tiller of the soil; his punishment was that the ground would no longer be productive for him. He would be a fugitive and a wanderer. However, God's wrath is ever tempered with mercy. As Cain complained that his punishment would result in his being murdered, the Lord safeguarded Cain with a mark (of unspecified nature) to give him safety. Also the Lord uttered a threat of sevenfold vengeance on any who should slay Cain (Gen. 4:13-15).

The wrath of God is further manifested in the flood. Wickedness, which is described as "every imagination of the

thought of man's heart was only evil continually," brought regret to the Lord that he had made man on earth. The Lord decided to sweep the earth clean, but in mercy he saved Noah and seven others. The instructions for Noah were explicit and detailed. The writer summarizes, "Noah did all that the Lord commanded him" (Gen. 7:5).

No less stern was the Lord when men in the plain of Shinar decided to build a tower with its top in heaven, wanting to make a name for themselves. The Lord confused the languages, and the building came to a halt (Gen. 11:1-9). The Lord defeated their purpose and scattered them over the earth.

The men of Sodom are said to have been wicked, great sinners against the Lord (Gen. 13:13). However, even these people were not destroyed until two angels had visited and examined the city (Gen. 19:1). There, finding conditions equal to the evil reputation of the city, the men hastened Lot, his wife, and his daughters out of the impending destruction (cf. 2 Pet. 2:7). Disobedient to the command not to look back (Gen. 19:17), Lot's wife became a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26; cf. Lk. 17:32).

But the demonstrations of the severity of God are not yet complete. Er, Judah's oldest son, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord slew him (Gen. 38:7). Then the Lord also slew the second son, Onan, for his wickedness (Gen. 38:10).

The writer of Genesis does not undertake to explain why the Lord evaluates some sins more seriously than others. At the same time, he is fully persuaded that the demands of the Lord are strict; obedience is essential; and every transgression and disobedience brings punishment.

### THE GOD OF THE COVENANT

Even the casual reader of Genesis should perceive that it is the story of God's working with men. The early chapters trace rejected and accepted lines. The line of Cain (Gen. 4:17-25) is traced before that of Seth (Gen. 5:6-32), but then dropped from further consideration. In the line of Seth, the many other sons and daughters of each generation are passed over as the line is



traced to Noah. The line of Shem and Japheth are traced (Gen. 10:1-20) before that of Shem (Gen. 10:21-31). Again, other sons and daughters are passed over to trace the line of Shem to Abraham (Gen. 11:10-30). As the pattern is continued, Ishmael is rejected in favor of Jacob (Gen. 21:18-21) and his descendants traced (Gen. 25:12-18), as are those of Keturah (Gen. 25:1-4), before the line of Isaac. Jacob is chosen over Esau, but the line of Esau is given (Gen. 36:1-42) before the story of Jacob is continued.

That the Lord chose Abraham and his descendants is depicted in Genesis beyond dispute; however, Genesis does not give any rationale like that given in Deuteronomy where the choice is an act of love on the Lord's part (Deut. 7:7, 8) or like that of Isaiah where Israel is to be a light to the nations (Is. 42:6). Abraham attributes his action to the election of God (Gen. 24:7; cf. Josh. 24:3). The choice of Abraham became a common theme in Israel's literature (cf. Ps. 105:5-11, 42; Is. 41:8, 9; 51:2; Mic. 7:20).

Genesis traces the choice of Abraham in retrospect back to Ur (Gen. 15:7; cf. 11:31) without narrating it. The call in Haran with its promises is explicit (Gen. 12:1-3), and its promise is repeated (Gen. 22:17, 18) with the figures of stars of the heavens and sands of the seashore for numbers. The promises are continued to Isaac (Gen. 26:4) and to Jacob (Gen. 28:14).

Although in a prophetic accusation Israel is said to have broken the covenant like Adam, the passage is obscure because the Hebrew words for "Adam" and "man" are identical. It is a judgment call which way the term is understood. Furthermore, this passage may be rendered "at Adam" rather than "like Adam" (Hos. 6:7). Adam (Josh. 3:16) is a place on the Jordan River near where the present ed-Damiyeh bridge crosses. The prophet may be alluding to religious acts carried out there. Yet another conjecture is that this phrase means "like dirt." Genesis does not speak of a covenant made with Adam.

In Genesis, *berith* is used for agreements made between individuals. The idiom is *karath berith* ("cut a covenant"). Abimelech and Abraham at Beersheba ended a struggle over a well of water (Gen. 21:27, 32). Abimelech also made a covenant

of peace with Isaac (Gen. 26:28). Laban, when frustrated in Gilead in his pursuit of Jacob, proposed a covenant of non-aggression (Gen. 31:44).

The writer of Genesis does not elaborate on the differences and similarities of covenants made between equals and the covenants God makes with his people. Allusion to God's covenants begins with his promise to keep Noah, his family, and pairs of all flesh alive through Noah's building the ark (Gen. 6:18). It would appear that Noah is bound to build the ark and collect the animals. God is bound to spare them from the flood. Noah did what God commanded, and the Lord spared them.

Following the flood, the Lord made a covenant with Noah and his descendants as well as with the living creatures that came out of the ark. The Lord promised that never again would a flood destroy the earth. The sign of this covenant is the rainbow in the clouds. The Lord promised that when seeing the bow in the clouds to remember his promise called an everlasting covenant (*berith 'olam*; Gen. 9:8-17).

The Lord is said to have made a covenant with Abram on the day a deep sleep came on Abram. At the Lord's instructions, Abram had prepared victims and cut them in two. While Abram was in his sleep, the Lord revealed to him that his descendants would be slaves in Egypt four hundred years but would come back to Canaan in the fourth generation. A flaming torch passed between the sacrificial pieces. The Lord promised the land from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:9-19). It is thought by some scholars that in ancient covenant ceremonies the sacrificial victims were a part of the oath taken by the parties that they be cut in pieces (as the victims were) if they broke the agreement. The Hebrew idiom "cut a covenant" for making one is thought to have arisen in this way.

The promises emphasize numerous descendants (Gen. 15:4, 5; 16:10-12; 17:5; 28:14) but also involve the land (Gen. 12:7; 13:17; 28:13) with very strong phrases like "forever" (*'adh-'olam*; Gen. 13:15) and "everlasting possession" (*'achuzzath 'olam*; Gen. 17:8; 48:4). The working out of these promises lies beyond the scope of Genesis.

Of particular importance for Old Testament and New Tes-



tament study is the covenant made with Abram when he was ninety-nine years old. The Lord promised numerous descendants, that Abram would be the father of a multitude of nations, and that his name would be changed to Abraham. The covenant was an everlasting covenant with Abraham and his descendants. The land of Canaan was promised as an everlasting possession (Gen. 17:4-8).

The obligation of the participants in this covenant was that every male be circumcised. Both those born in Abraham's house and those bought with his money that were eight days old were to be circumcised. The penalty for neglect was to be cut off from the people (Gen. 17:9-14).

Stephen alludes to this covenant as "the covenant of circumcision" (Acts 7:8). Paul speaks of Abraham's receiving circumcision (Rom. 4:11, 12) as a sign or seal of the righteousness he had before he was circumcised.

The promises God made to Abraham (Gen. 22:15-18) are renewed to Isaac (Gen. 26:3-5) and Jacob (Gen. 28:13; 35:11, 12; 46:3) and would be the basis on which Joseph requested his corpse to be taken to Canaan (Gen. 50:24).

## THE GOD OF PROVIDENCE

The English Bible, by its translation of *shabath* as "rested" (Gen. 2:2), invites the reader to assume that God, perhaps suffering fatigue from creating, went into a state of inactivity after creation had been finished. The verb does mean to cease an action but does not suggest "rest" as that term is most commonly used in English. Rabbis debated with Gentiles what God had been doing since creation.

Genesis presents a God who has been continuously active in accomplishing his purpose in the world he made, punishing transgressors of his will, but blessing those who are obedient. The God of Genesis is a God who has made appearances to his chosen figures (Gen. 18:1-21), has revealed himself in visions (Gen. 15:1) and in dreams (Gen. 15:12; 26:23, 24). He also has conveyed revelation through his angel (Gen. 21:17). Indeed, God in times past spoke to the fathers "in many and various

ways" (Heb. 1:1).

God's providence delivered Noah and his family from the waters of the flood. As earlier mentioned, it selected Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 15:7) and later called him out of Haran (Gen. 12:1) with promises to bless those who bless Abram and curse those who curse him. He afflicted Pharaoh when Pharaoh had taken Sarah (Gen. 12:17). He is a God for whom nothing is too hard (Gen. 18:14). He gave barren Sarah a child after her husband was old and she was beyond the age of childbearing (Gen. 18:9, 10; 21:1, 2).

God's providence extended to Ishmael of whom he purposed to make a great nation (Gen. 21:18). However, though Ishmael's descendants are traced (Gen. 25:12-18), Ishmael's line is not within the purpose for which the writer of Genesis traces God's providence.

God's providence included the sending of his angel ahead of the servant of Abraham to choose a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:7). Events fell into place as the servant proposed, and Rebekah made herself known (Gen. 24:14, 24-27). Laban accepted the idea (Gen. 24:50).

God's providence chose Jacob over Esau before the boys were born and before they had done anything good or evil (Gen. 25:23; cf. Mal. 1:2, 3; Rom. 9:13). The Lord gives oracles (*ne'um 'adhonai*; Gen. 25:22, 23) revealing fortunes. Providence was promised Jacob at Bethel (Gen. 28:15). Providence guided Jacob to the house of Laban, made him rich when Laban would have cheated him (Gen. 31:6-16), ordered him to return home (Gen. 31:3), and prohibited Laban from harming him when Laban pursued him (Gen. 31:24). The Lord opens the womb (Gen. 29:31; 30:17, 22) but also withholds children (Gen. 30:2). Jacob further expressed his belief in providence in his blessings on Joseph's sons (Gen. 48:15, 21).

The story of Joseph is a demonstration of how God is able to use the sinful traits of men's nature and their sinful acts to accomplish his purpose. Joseph was subject to the jealousy of his brothers for both his father's open favoritism and for his dreams. Perhaps the guilt was not all on one side. Who would want to defend Joseph for revealing his inflammatory dreams?



It brought rebuke from his father (Gen. 37:10). Who would suppose that brothers would react other than with hatred?

The jealousy of the brothers put Joseph in the pit in Dothan, sold him to the Ishmaelite traders, and brought him to Egypt with the brothers having no concern for the grief they were causing their father. They were rid of Joseph once and for all; they assumed they had negated the dreams. But in Egypt the Lord had not abandoned Joseph (Gen. 39:2). He rose to be in charge of all that Potiphar had. But Potiphar's wife had ideas. Her advances were not a one-time affair. She spoke to him day after day and finally attempted to force him. Having failed, in order to save herself, she fainted having been attacked. Joseph went to prison where the king's prisoners were kept, but the Lord was still with him and he rose to be in charge of all the prisoners (Gen. 39:22, 23).

The chief butler and chief baker dreamed their dreams, and Joseph interpreted them with the request that he be remembered by the butler when he was restored to his high position. But with the lack of gratitude characteristic of many, once restored to his position, the butler forgot Joseph. The two more years in prison were long. But with the dream of Pharaoh which the Egyptian magicians and wise men could not interpret, the butler remembered what had happened to him. Had Joseph been in any other place or had he been released earlier, we probably would never have heard of him.

The interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams put Joseph at the head of the Egyptian bureaucracy to save the nation from starvation. The famine brought Joseph's brothers to Egypt. He was able to save them from starvation and also to bring his father and his brothers to Egypt for survival. There his people grew in time to be a mighty people under the protection of Egypt, the leading western power of the time.

The story of Joseph is not a story of how God protected his people from unpleasant experiences. Living in a home where one is surrounded by hatred and jealousy is not easy. One cannot even imagine Joseph while in the pit, while in chains stripped of his clothing on the way to Egypt, while in the temptation, or while in the Egyptian prison clapping his hands

and jumping in joy, shouting "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord." They were conditions of life that make a person ask automatically, "What have I done?" and "Why is this happening to me?"

At the end of it all, when it had all turned out fortunately and the brothers came begging for forgiveness, Joseph could realize that there had been a factor in his life which he had not been able to see as calamity after calamity had taken place. He said to his brothers, "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5). After his father's death, he said to them, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today" (Gen. 50:20).

Joseph knew that Israel would go out of Egypt to its own land but could not have known that in addition to saving people alive what had happened was a part of a larger story of God's action for the redemption of the sins, not only of his people but of all mankind. That was beyond his horizon, and it took the incarnation to make it known.

Genesis is the story of God's creation and of God's providence. It is indispensable to faith.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>F. M. Cross, "el," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, G. J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., John Willis, tr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 1:246-61 (hereafter cited as *TDOT*).

<sup>2</sup>Helmer Ringgren, "elohim," *TDOT*, 1:267-84.

<sup>3</sup>E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 124c, g.

<sup>4</sup>Exceptions are to be seen in the M. T. at Gen. 20:13; 35:7 where the English translations follow the versions.

<sup>5</sup>D. N. Freedman, M. P. O'Connor, and H. Ringgren, "Yahweh," *TDOT*, 5:500-21.

<sup>6</sup>O. Eissfeldt, 'adon, *TDOT*, 1:62-72.

<sup>7</sup>M. H. Segal, *The Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 5, 6.

<sup>8</sup>Carl E. Amerding, *The Old Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 29-32.

<sup>9</sup>I. M. Kikawada and A. Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1985), 17.



<sup>10</sup>Segal, 119-21.

<sup>11</sup>I. Engell, *A Rigid Scrutiny*, J. T. Willis, tr. (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 50-67.

<sup>12</sup>U. Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 31.

<sup>13</sup>Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, no. 124g, n. 2; see also Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks (London: SCM Press, 1961), 57.

<sup>14</sup>Philo, *On the Creation* 75.

## MAN IN GENESIS

Jim Howard

### FROM EDEN TO BABEL: MAN'S BEGINNING (Genesis 1—11)

Genesis is the book of beginnings. In a real sense this portion of Scripture provides the bedrock of our faith. Through the thousands of years of pre-history and recorded history, though customs and cultures have changed, man has not changed. Human nature is the link of understanding. And the book of Genesis provides one of the most comprehensive chronicles of human nature to be found in literature. Genesis is about God and man.

But to a very large degree what we find in Genesis will be determined by what we bring to Genesis. Thus the necessity of a few introductory comments concerning how we should approach this pivotal writing.

#### *How to Read Genesis 1—11*

The Bible is an extremely diverse literary treasure. Because of that diversity one must be quite certain properly to identify the literary genre of each block of biblical material.

What kind of book is Genesis? And, since any reader senses a dramatic transition between Genesis chapters 11 and 12, what kind of literature is Genesis 1—11?

Genesis 1—11 must be approached in a worshipful frame of mind. Claus Westermann reminds us that the entire wealth of biblical statements concerning Creator and creation stand in conjunction with the praise of God. The real purpose of the creation account can be appreciated only when one considers that the original hearers of the creation narrative heard it as



part of Israel's total praise of God as Creator. The creation is worship material. It should be read much more like we would read Psalm 104 than the way we would read Acts 2. Such an approach resolves a number of difficulties, especially those raised by the natural sciences.<sup>1</sup>

### *Man's Creation*

Genesis provides us with two accounts of man's creation. The account in chapter 1 is a much more self-contained story. The account in chapter 2 is much more intimately connected with the narrative of man's fall in chapter 3. In Gen. 1:26 the creation of man is viewed by God as the crowning achievement of his creative efforts. He says, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." The plural "us" is most likely not a Trinitarian statement, nor an editorial we, but rather the plurality of God and his heavenly court.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note God's instruction or charge to the newly created man. He is endowed with sovereignty over the created order. It is God's will that man be busy ruling over the created order. Man is God's grounds keeper.

Much attention has been given to Gen. 1:27. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." In what did the image of God consist? The terms "image" and "likeness" are an attempt to picture created man as a totality, not a fragmented being broken down into his parts. Thus one does well to split the physical from the spiritual in man's nature as little as possible.<sup>3</sup> The language is intended to demonstrate the close similarity of man to his Creator. Man is pictured as being above and beyond the animal creation. Being a partaker of the divine nature, man possesses the rational powers to transcend the animal level. He is not only intelligent but also spiritually sensitive and perceptive. Man is also created male and female. One would be incomplete without the other. Man and woman are for each other in God's plan not only for companionship, but also to be able to carry out God's plan of propagation,

increase, and fruitfulness. It is extremely significant that in Gen. 1:31 God surveys his completed creation, now crowned by man, and concludes that it is all very good. Sin had not as yet made its ugly intrusion into the created order.

Beginning with Gen. 2:4, the reader is introduced to a different kind of narrative. Earlier interpreters concluded that the second creation account was a "flashback," a re-telling of the events of the sixth day of creation in greater detail. Today, however, it is generally agreed that this is a completely different and distinct version of the creation event.<sup>4</sup> The narrative is penned from a different perspective. The story moves intentionally toward the tragic events of chapter 3. Gen. 2:7 is a climactic statement: "... the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Two crucially important conclusions are made. First, man is dust. This is Scripture's way of saying, Man has his limitations. Man may live under the allusion that he is divine, but his destiny of dust proves the falsehood of the allusion. Man's later problems stem from his failure to accept this truth. Second, God breathes into man "the breath of life" and man becomes a living being (*nephesh hayyāh*). God imparts to newly created man life, the essence of his own being. The person as a living being is to be understood as a total unity, rather than as a body infused with a living soul.<sup>5</sup> It is for this reason that later biblical anthropology and eschatology opt for the bodily-resurrection concept rather than the Greek immortality-of-the-soul concept. Man does not have a body; rather he is a body.

Man is presented in Genesis 2 as a creature with needs. God provides trees pleasing to the eye and good for food (v. 9). Man's need for gainful employment is satisfied by God's mandate that man work and take care of the beautiful garden. Man's need for authority is provided by God's orders that man name every living creature (Gen. 2:19, 20). Gen. 2:16 for the first time introduces the theme of human freedom. "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Does perhaps the negative com-



mand plant in Adam's mind the seed of potential rebelliousness?

In Gen. 2:18 it is as if God stands back to survey the completed creation. Something is missing. "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." "But for Adam no suitable helper was found" (Gen. 2:18-20). The Lord God caused Adam to fall asleep and from one of his ribs, close to his heart, he made woman. Woman is so similar to man that her name even sounds like his.<sup>6</sup> The man and woman were both naked, but felt no shame, for the ingredients of shame were not yet visible in the created order.

With the completion of the creation of woman, man is now a unified being according to God's plan and purpose. Woman's companionship immeasurably multiplies man's potential to live up to his "Image of God" status. To protect the sacredness of the marriage covenant, man is instructed to "leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). In practical terms, this means leaving geographically, financially, and emotionally.

### *Man's Fall*

As chapter 3 begins, the life of the man and woman seems rather simple and uncomplicated. Life is lived in the context of three divinely-ordained parameters: vocation, permit, and prohibition.<sup>7</sup> As long as man chooses to live in the freedom of these limitations, he exists in peace and happiness. But all of that is about to change with the appearance of the serpent.

In the serpent's question, "Did God really say . . . ?" the serpent does not outright deny God's authority but, rather, subtly questions it. The seed of doubt is planted. Bonhoeffer calls this "the religious question" and does a beautiful job of showing that what the serpent actually attacks is the veracity of "the Word of God."<sup>8</sup> Man's "fall" and essential sin in every age is his proclivity of questioning the Word of God. The serpent suggests that man should go behind the Word of God and establish its meaning based on his own understanding of the being of God. This is the basis of all sin. It is *hubris* or human pride. "The possibility of our *own* 'will to be for God,' discovered by ourselves, is the real evil in the serpent's question."

"While appearing to be religious this question attacks God as the ultimate presupposition of all existence."<sup>9</sup>

The serpent's deception continues as he asserts, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). Then God's motives are impugned as the serpent asserts that God's command is self-serving in his not wanting the man and woman to be on equal footing with himself, "knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Eve, whose name means *living*, now becomes the agent of death. She partakes of the forbidden fruit and gives to Adam, and he partakes. Their eyes now being open, they are no longer innocent. Guilt has now entered the created order. Their awareness of nakedness places the beautiful reality of their sexuality (all that God had created was very good, Gen. 1:31) in question. Sex now somehow becomes related to guilt.

Man as sinner now becomes man alienated from his maker. Man as sinner also becomes man afraid (Gen. 3:10). The beautiful, paradisaical, intimate relation of the man and woman to their maker no longer exists. Though humanity's freedom obviously has been damaged, God still grants the transgressors the freedom to say everything germane to their defense.<sup>10</sup> Further evidence of man and woman's fall lies in their quick attribution of fault to other than themselves—"The woman you put here with me. . . ." (Gen. 3:12) and "The serpent deceived me. . . ." (Gen. 3:13). Here we see another fundamental characteristic of human nature—man's inability to live by personal accountability. It is noteworthy that though God punishes Adam and Eve by expulsion from the garden, that very act is one of love, grace, and protection lest they eat of the tree of life and live forever in their unsuited, sinful state. "Their likeness to gods gives them . . . the capability to introduce immense suffering into the world; and if they could live forever, the suffering would become infinite."<sup>11</sup> A number of curses are placed upon the man and woman, not the least that of mortality stated in God's promise: ". . . for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19).

It is to be noted that Genesis 4—11, though covering an enormous time frame and numerous fascinating events, really only restates the basic motifs of the first three chapters. Sin,



now released into the world, knows no stopping place. God's image in man is now marred. Man's alienation from God results in horizontal alienation of one man from another. Thus Cain's murder of Abel (chap. 4). The intermingling of the sons of God and daughters of men (Gen. 6:1-3) may be a symbolic reference to man's usurpation of his rightful status.

The flood (Gen. 6:5—9:28) is a classic example of the result of man's flaunted autonomy applied. Sin has gone rampant. Noah stands tall, however, as an example of the truth that, despite sin, men of faith are still to be found on the earth.

The tower of Babel graphically illustrates man's continuous rebelliousness. As men's ambitions consume them, they seek "to make a name for themselves" by attempting to build a tower that reaches the heavens" (Gen. 11:4). As Willis points out, it is certainly not sinful in and of itself to build a city and a tower. "The real sin is the self-centered attitude of the heart which often motivates such activity."<sup>12</sup> Again, to guard the cosmic order from man's prideful pretensions, the Lord confused their language (thus, the name *Babel*) and scattered humanity over the face of the whole earth (Gen. 11:7-9). Man's pride and self-idolatry continue to manifest sin's power and dominance as we come to the conclusion of primeval history.

### FROM ABRAHAM TO JOSEPH: MAN IN GOD'S PURPOSE (Genesis 12—50)

To even the casual reader, there appears to be a major break between Genesis 11 and 12. Whereas the fascinating episodes of the primeval narrative seem to have about them a hazy, nebulous, other-worldly quality, the stories of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are written in language that sounds much more like later history. Someone has well said that Genesis can best be diagrammed as an hourglass. The focus of the first eleven chapters moves from mankind in general toward the one man Abraham. The focus of chapters 12 through 50, on the other hand, moves from the one man

Abraham toward God's salvation plan for all mankind. "The story commences with one individual, and extends gradually to his family, then to a people, and later still to a nation."<sup>13</sup>

What is the significance of the patriarchal history? The stories' purpose is to explain

... the elementary foundations of human society: the relationship between parents and children primarily in the story of Abraham (Genesis 12—25), the relationship between brothers primarily in the story of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27—36), the relationship among several members of a family in the Joseph story (Genesis 37—50).<sup>14</sup>

These stories gave expression to "the fundamental importance of the family for all other forms of society in a period when the tribes were developing into a people and state."<sup>15</sup>

As we attempt to understand the concept of man set forth in Genesis, we find in the stories of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph highly significant material. For reasons unknown, Isaac is relegated to a very minor role in Genesis, receiving a scant two chapters attention.

#### *Abraham: Man of Faith*

The name "Abraham" (actually "Abram" as the story begins) has come to be synonymous with faith and faithfulness. In fact he is designated "Father of the Faithful." But the nature of Abraham's faith tells us a great deal about the nature of man as God intended him to be.

Gen. 12:1-3 provides one of the pivotal passages in all of Scripture. Faith begins with promise. The Lord promises to make of Abraham a great nation, to make his name great (probably a veiled reference to the number of his posterity), and to bless all people through him (Gen. 12:2). Shortly thereafter is added the fourth dimension of the promise, namely the land (12:7). God seals these great promises of blessing by the giving and ratifying of a covenant (chaps. 15, 17). The covenant is symbolized by the required action of circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14).

The profundity and power of Abraham's faith is demon-



strated in three great specifics of his life. First, he obeys when the Lord commands him to leave his family and the familiarity and highly developed culture of Ur of the Chaldeans to go to a yet unspecified land which will be given to him and his descendants (Gen. 12:2).<sup>16</sup> Second, Abraham, then ninety-nine years old, is called to respond to God's promise that a son would be born to his barren wife, Sarah (Gen. 18:10). Third, after the son Isaac is born, the Lord commands Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:1-14).

Abraham passed all three "tests" of faith howbeit not without great struggles and anguish of heart. It becomes immediately obvious that though Abraham is the prototype of God's ideal of faith, he by no means is perfect, nor does he escape the implications of man's fallen nature earlier analyzed in Genesis 3. Twice out of fear and the instinct of self-preservation, he lies about the identity of his wife (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18). He and Sarah take it upon themselves to "assist" God in his promise of an heir by utilizing the services of a maidservant by whom Abraham can have a son (Gen. 16:1-16). And Abraham seems to have doubted God's promise that a son would be born to his ninety-year-old wife, Sarah (Gen. 17:17). Yet the Lord accepted Abraham's faith, for he "believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

Our observation of Abraham's faith tells us a great deal about the nature of man and God's expectation of his creature. Man is so made as to be able, and to be held accountable, to trust God and believe his promises even when such believing defies human reason. Westermann maintains that the majority of scholars unanimously single out one trait of the religion of the patriarchs, and many regard this trait as determinative, namely a personal relationship with God.<sup>17</sup> Jumping out of every page is this definition of Abraham's faith as personal relationship. Abraham walked intimately with God. The relationship even allowed the Lord to accept a faith tinged in human doubt. Abraham's faith is overwhelming confidence that God will care for him. A classic example is his response, during the great testing time of offering up his son, to Isaac's question, "... where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (Gen.

22:7). Abraham answers, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Gen. 22:8). Abraham's calm assurance should remind man of every age that the capability of saving faith is surely his. Yet it is also obvious that the Lord's word to Abraham "is a call to abandonment, renunciation, and relinquishment. It is a call for a dangerous departure from the presumed world of norms and security."<sup>18</sup>

### *Jacob: Man of Conflict*

If the key term to describe Abraham is faith, the central concept useful for defining Jacob seems to be conflict. This patriarch experiences conflict with his father, Isaac (chap. 27), conflict with his brother, Esau (beginning with chapter 27 and continuing through the entire narrative), conflict with his uncle and father-in-law, Laban (Gen. 30:25—31:55), conflict with his wife Rachel over her inability to have children (Gen. 30:1), and conflict with an angelic being (Gen. 32:22-32).

Conflict appears to be one of the most dominant traits of his life. Westermann explains the origin of this conflict. He postulates that the determining motif in Genesis 12—25 was survival from one generation to the next, a logical emphasis based on the high priority given family solidarity throughout the patriarchal narratives. The determining motif in Genesis 27, however, is "handing on," a process which raises the question, who gets what. The result is conflict, first and foremost conflict between Jacob and Esau.<sup>19</sup> Based on his desire for a position of power in the perpetuating of the patriarchal traditions, Jacob first steals his brother's birthright (Gen. 25:24-34) and then deceives his father, Isaac, into granting to him rather than Esau the blessing (chap. 27). Both the birthright and blessing were legitimately Esau's by right of primogeniture.<sup>20</sup> In what is one of Genesis' great understatements, Esau notes, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: he took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing" (Gen. 27:36).

The shrewdness of Jacob's business dealings is experienced firsthand by Laban. Through duplicity and wit, Jacob becomes extremely rich at Laban's expense (chap. 30). Aided and abetted in his deceitfulness by Rachel, Jacob also steals Laban's



household gods, the supposed source of Laban's power and wealth (Gen. 31:19-37).

What does the Jacob story teach us about the nature of man? If we are honest, we have to admit that the Jacob narrative causes us some problems—moral and ethical problems. Does the Lord approve of the patriarch's shyster lifestyle? His entire life from birth appears to be self-centered and shrewdly manipulative. Anyone having dealings with Jacob comes out second best. And yet God chose to continue his promise to Abraham through this kind of individual (Rom. 9:13; "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.").

I think the Jacob narrative is even more closely related to the primeval history than is the Abraham narrative. Here is a powerful testimony to God's grace, man's sinfulness, and God's purpose which is big enough and powerful enough to work through man's shortcomings. To assume that God approved of or found favor in Jacob's unethical practices and dishonesty would fly in the face of the total thrust of Scripture as the reflection of God's heart most perfectly depicted in Jesus Christ. Yet God's covenant and eternal salvation plan he has chosen to implement through most sinful humanity. God's grace may be extensive enough even to deal with a Jacob who, in his better moments, still trusted in and called upon the Lord for deliverance. Yet, because of inspiration's honesty, the Jacob narrative provides a graphic picture of the more sordid side of human nature. We would be much the poorer without that picture.

#### *Joseph: Man of Wisdom*

With the beginning of Genesis 37 one has the feeling of traveling new territory. The story of Joseph moves in a radically different milieu. Very little emphasis is given to the great salvation history themes of the earlier patriarchs: God's promises of blessings, posterity, wealth, and land; the covenant; faithfulness and obedience. An exception to the new direction is the stress on God's providence exemplified by Joseph's concluding statement: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done"

(Gen. 50:20).

If Joseph does not fit the standard patriarchal model, where is his narrative to be placed? The answer is Israelite wisdom. Gerhard von Rad seems to have been the first modern Old Testament scholar to draw this conclusion. In von Rad's view, "wisdom thus consisted in knowing that at the bottom of things order is at work, silently and often in scarcely noticeable way, making for a balance of events."<sup>21</sup> The Joseph narrative is, in von Rad's opinion, "the wisdom teaching of the Old Testament at its most distilled, and the sum total of the whole story is expressed when the opinion is given that all human life is completely under the sovereign sway of God (50:20)."<sup>22</sup>

In Joseph is to be seen not only the theological wisdom to apprehend in the strange sequence of events in his life the purpose of God at work but also the practical, experiential wisdom of perceiving and practicing orderliness in daily life. It is a *charisma* of wisdom which enables Joseph to give interpretations of dreams hidden from the Egyptian wise men (Gen. 41:16).<sup>23</sup> We are told that the silver cup placed in Benjamin's grain sack by Joseph's servants is the one he used for "divination" (Gen. 40:5), and divination was in the ancient world thought to be a function of wisdom. In the rare acumen of his administrative ability, another wisdom trait, Joseph lived up to Pharaoh's assessment: ". . . there is no one so discerning and wise as you" (Gen. 41:39, 40). Not to be overlooked are Joseph's high moral values so prized in the book of Proverbs demonstrated in his victory over the seductive wiles of Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:6-20) and his exemplary patience as he waits two full years for the butler whose dream he had interpreted to remember to mention his name to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:1). Yet Joseph's wisdom is not to be viewed as totally secular. The narrative urges "that in the contingencies of history, the purposes of God are at work in hidden and unnoticed ways."<sup>24</sup>

What does the Joseph story teach us about the nature of man as God's creature? We are reminded that God has placed in man the potential to become a Joseph. Man in God's purpose not only may be endowed with such wisdom traits as sagacity,



prudence, patience, foresight, discipline, high moral values, and administrative ability, but equally important God stands ready, through his powerful and all-encompassing providence, to assist man in utilizing these traits toward the end of accomplishing God's design and at the same time activating in man the process of personal growth and maturity.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation*, Facet Books, No. 7 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 4-5.

<sup>2</sup>Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 144-45.

<sup>3</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 56.

<sup>4</sup>Donald E. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1-11*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 33.

<sup>5</sup>Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 207.

<sup>6</sup>The Hebrew word for man is *ish*; the term for woman *ishshah*.

<sup>7</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 46.

<sup>8</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 66ff.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 68-69.

<sup>10</sup>Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 24.

<sup>11</sup>Gowan, 61.

<sup>12</sup>John T. Willis, *Genesis*, The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 2 (Abilene, Tex.: ACU Press, 1979), 197.

<sup>13</sup>E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible, Vol. 1 (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1964), 87.

<sup>14</sup>Westermann, *Genesis*, 88.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>G. Henton Davies, "Genesis," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1969), 168.

<sup>17</sup>Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-26* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 109-10.

<sup>18</sup>Brueggemann, 118.

<sup>19</sup>Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 444.

<sup>20</sup>Brueggemann, 209. Brueggemann states, "The conflict of Jacob is a conflict not with 'spiritual' realities, but with the ways in which human life has been institutionalized. Primogeniture . . . is the linchpin of an entire social and legal system . . . the narrative . . . dares to call into question a conventional settlement of power."

<sup>21</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. I (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 428.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 440.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 442.

<sup>24</sup>Brueggemann, 289.

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## SIN IN GENESIS

Clyde M. Woods

Man as sinner is a predominant theme in Genesis. In my judgment no biblical book has more to contribute to our understanding of the biblical doctrine of sin. Not only does Genesis detail the origin of sin within the human race in the account of man's fall in chapter 3, but the book carries through with many character sketches which illustrate the intense devastation wickedness works within the human heart. The origin of sin, sin's insidious nature, and sin's destructive consequences are all chronicled here, so it is not surprising that later Scriptures reflect repeatedly on the examples of sin's reality and power first revealed in Genesis.

### SIN IS UNIVERSAL

All people have sinned and fallen short of the glory God intends for them. Stated as the masterful conclusion of the apostolic indictment of mankind in Rom. 1:18—3:20, 23, this truth is amply exemplified in Genesis. From first to last, from creation until Joseph's burial in an Egyptian coffin, the characters in Genesis demonstrate the universal fact of sin. In the primeval history recorded in chapters 2 through 11, Adam and Eve fell, Cain murdered his brother, and his descendant Lamech exalted violence (Gen. 4:23, 24). As prelude to the judgment of the flood, "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5), and again, "God saw the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth" (Gen. 6:12).

In the chosen patriarchal line, Abraham sought to avoid conflict by means of half-truth (Gen. 12:13), Rebekah and her son Jacob conspired to deceive her husband, Isaac, while two of Jacob's sons slaughtered the Shechemites in the name of righteous indignation (Gen. 34:25). Joseph's brothers envied him so much they were ready to kill him, relenting only at the suggestion that selling him was much more profitable. Judah, ancestor of David and hence of Christ, committed harlotry without apparent remorse. Thus, the human record is a sinful record, and the emphasis in Genesis upon the good does not prevent its graphically depicting the darker side of human experience.

Sin is endemic to the human experience, then, and should not be thought of as accidental, or random. Sin is the spiritual cancer we all share. This is not to say there were not or are not good people, but such exemplary figures as Enoch, Noah, and Abraham excelled as men, human, fallible, and prone to iniquity. This is not to say that sinfulness is inherited, but that it is universal, endemic, and deadly serious. Emphasizing this important truth is the fact, at first curious and perplexing, that the sinfulness of man, given in Gen. 6:5-12 as the divine reason for the flood-judgment, is repeated in Gen. 8:21 as the divine reason why judgment by water would not again occur.

### THE FIRST SIN PROVIDES A MODEL

Immediately following the dramatic panoramic presentation of humanity as the climax of God's creative activity (Gen. 1:26, 27) and the more detailed description of Adam and Eve's creation in chapter 2, Genesis 3 depicts mankind's fall in the first sin. This tragedy not only had important implications for the whole human race, as the apostle Paul argues repeatedly (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22), but this first sin also becomes in Scripture somewhat of a model in regard to the universal human experience of sin. How mankind fell is in principle how mankind falls. Close examinations of the Edenic events will help us understand avenues of temptation, sin's allure, and its devastation.



Using a serpent, the Tempter approached the woman Eve with a seemingly harmless question, yet one cleverly designed to arouse doubt, i.e., "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" (Gen. 3:1). When Eve in reply described God's one restriction along with the severe penalty for its violation, the Tempter advanced from doubt to denial by boldly declaring, "You will not die" (Gen. 3:4). He then proceeded to attribute God's restriction to an unworthy divine motivation, suggesting that in truth God designed to withhold good from the human pair. "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 4:5). This half-truth clinched the Tempter's case, so that the woman felt the full force of seduction and succumbed, being deceived (Gen. 3:6). Thus the Tempter took three steps in seducing Eve:

- (1) He cast doubt on God's Word.
- (2) He denied God's Word.
- (3) He questioned God's character and motivation.

Furthermore, Gen. 3:6 reveals that the Tempter utilized three avenues of temptation, "when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise," she sinned. This text marks three avenues or channels of human temptation as:

- (1) Physical appetites—"good for food"
- (2) Sensual appeal—"delight to the eyes"
- (3) Human pride—"desired to make one wise"

The apostle John reflects on this temptation scene in 1 Jn. 2:16 when he declares the (hostile to God) "world" to consist of these same three qualities which he terms, respectively, "the lust of the flesh," "the lust of the eyes," and "the pride of life." Interestingly, Satan used similar if not identical channels in his unsuccessful temptation of Jesus (Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13), and Isaiah depicts inordinate pride as the essence of human sin (Is. 2:11-22).

The origin of sin in the human heart is thus seen to parallel the origin of sin in the human race. Sin, whatever its outward manifestation, takes place first within the heart, as Jesus himself declared (Mt. 15:18-20; Mk. 7:20-22). This truth James

emphasizes in his categorical denial that the God who richly blesses humans with every spiritual good could also seduce men to evil. While God allows people to be tested, he does not tempt them to do evil, but rather "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (Jas. 1:15).

## SIN'S NATURE STANDS REVEALED

The usual Hebrew vocabulary for sin is reflected in Genesis. These words are in themselves pictures of the nature of sin. The principle word is *chatah* ("sin") which carries the idea of "missing the mark" to suggest that the sinner fails to meet the standard God has set for mankind. Another frequent Hebrew term is *pesha* ("rebellion," "transgression") which denotes a revolt against the divine standard. Also found is *avon* ("iniquity," "guilt") which suggests a twisting or distortion of the intended model. Thus, the Old Testament words for sin imply the reality of a divine standard which man fails in some way to meet. Such language suggests that the Creator, who has a prior claim on man's allegiance, has set a righteous standard for mankind. Sin consists in failing to honor the Lord's claim.

Interestingly, while these words for sin are sometimes found in Genesis, the textual narrative frequently pictures human sinfulness by simply describing human actions. For example, Genesis does not even specifically say that Adam and Eve sinned, but the text graphically portrays their sin. In my opinion, the Genesis portrayal of sin as universal is all the more powerful for the author's willingness to let the record speak for itself without constantly using the familiar words for sin.

If sin is pictured in Genesis as universal, it is also depicted as powerful in the Lord's unheeded admonition to Cain: "Sin is couching at the door, its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:7). One should also note again the "deceitfulness of sin" Eve experienced. Sin promises what it cannot deliver and delivers what it never promised.

Sin is universal; it is powerful; it is both deceptive and destructive. The remainder of the Scripture expands and elaborates on the insidious character of sin, but the foundation of



the biblical presentation is found in Genesis.

### SIN HAS DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES

Examining the model of sin in chapter 3 and surveying the numerous case studies throughout Genesis, we realize that sin produces many harmful effects. Sin hardens us, destroys our relationships, dominates and enslaves. Unrepented, sin pays its wages ultimately in the coin of death (Cf. Rom. 6:23; Jas. 1:15).

The ruin sin wreaks is starkly pictured in the Eden narrative. The Tempter promised pleasantness and wisdom; he delivered shame, guilt, and estrangement. Is it not always the case that sin looks better coming than going, i.e., what seems real and precious beforehand proves counterfeit and tawdry afterward? Sin's real character is unmasked in the aftermath of Adam and Eve's sin in Gen. 3:8-17. First, the joy of God's daily presence in life was immediately transformed to terror at his presence (Gen. 3:8). Second, Adam shrinks in our eyes as we hear him seek to blame both Eve and God for his sin (Gen. 3:12). Third, the symbolic curse on the serpent (Gen. 3:14), the woman's penalty (Gen. 3:16), and the man's punishment (Gen. 3:17-19) all reveal sin's devastation. Fourth, the judicial penalty of physical death (Gen. 2:17) passed upon the human race when the first pair sinned.

Sin's power to dominate is illustrated in the case of Cain. Urged by the Lord to resist sin's desire to control him (Gen. 4:7), Cain refused, murdered his brother, and thus ruined two lives (Abel's and his own) in one violent act. Sin has the power, not only to dominate, but even to enslave. The men of Sodom were enslaved to homosexual lust with no willingness to listen to righteous Lot's entreaty (19:9). The love of sin comes through sinning, and by sinning people forge their own spiritual chains. Sin is addictive, so that people lose their capacity and will to resist. Sin is a spiritual disease, a deadly cancer which rapidly develops momentum in its spread.

Sin is spiritual insanity. How else should one explain the murderous jealousy of Joseph's brothers or the violent hatred of Simeon and Levi in Shechem? Knowing the consequences,

people persist in making the same mistakes again and again. Is it not insane to continue to do the same thing and to expect a different result? Yet human beings continually repeat offenses to the extent that they become hardened in transgression. One example of this tendency is Lamech who seemed to exult in his developing capacity for violence (Gen. 4:23, 24). Other examples include the flood generation whose "wickedness . . . was great . . . and every imagination . . . was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5) and, again, the sick society of Sodom (Gen. 19:4, 5).

Spiritual insanity is also seen in the sinner's paranoia, an inordinate fearfulness witnessed in Genesis particularly in the lives of Cain, anxious lest someone should kill him as he had killed his brother (Gen. 4:14), and Joseph's brothers, afraid after their father's death that Joseph had long harbored thoughts of vengeance against them (Gen. 50:15).

All these episodes remind us what terrible price we pay physically, emotionally, and spiritually for our sin. Yet sin surrounds us always, so that we cry with the apostle, "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24). It is sweet to remember that God's answer to this anguished cry also begins in Genesis.

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# THE CONCEPT OF COVENANT IN GENESIS

F. Furman Kearley

## COVENANT CONCEPT IN THE RESTORATION

In preparation, the author searched but found no definitive treatise on the covenant by Restoration scholars. He checked with other Restoration scholars, and they knew of none either. This seems strange, especially since the Restoration Movement has placed much stress upon handling aright or rightly dividing the word of truth. We have stressed that to understand the Bible we must divide it into the three dispensations or covenants. These are called the Patriarchal Dispensation or Covenant, the Jewish or Mosaic Dispensation or Covenant, and the Christian or New Testament or Covenant. Perhaps, this has been the case because these have been accepted as presuppositions without the need for close examination of the nature of covenant.

In recent discussions concerning the new hermeneutics, some have discussed the nature of New Testament literature. A few have described it as love letters. None have identified the New Testament literature as to its actual, spiritual, and legal nature which is a covenant or covenant literature. In an article in the *Gospel Advocate*,<sup>1</sup> I proved the thesis that the New Testament is covenantal literature. We must study, understand, accept, and obey it as one would a last will or testament by which one is bound.

The concept of covenant, therefore, is vital and essential to our understanding the Bible, especially the New Testament, and our relationship to God. Most of us do not live with a constant awareness that we live in and will be judged by our

covenant relationship to God and Christ as Abraham and the Hebrews were in a covenant relationship to God.

## COVENANT: TERMS, DEFINITIONS AND SYNONYMS

*Webster's New World Dictionary* defines "covenant" as:

(1) a binding and solemn agreement to do or keep from doing a specified thing; compact; (2) an agreement among members of a church to defend and maintain its doctrines, polity and faith . . . ; (5) *Law* a) a formal sealed contract, b) a clause of such a contract, c) a suit for damages for violation of such a contract; (6) *Theol.* the promise made by God to man, as recorded in the Bible—*vt.* to promise by covenant—*vi.* to make a covenant.

This modern twentieth-century definition is indeed an accurate representation of the meaning of covenant as basically used in the Bible and in the proper division of the Bible into the Patriarchal Covenant, the Jewish Covenant, and the New Covenant.

Synonyms for the term "covenant" include: "contract," "agreement," and "compact." The original Hebrew word is *berit*. The KJV translates this word in 260 places as "covenant," in 2 as "confederacy," and in 17 as "league." Other versions primarily translate it by "covenant," but in some places they translate it by "treaty," "compact," and "solemn compact."

The etymology of *berit* is uncertain, but the meaning of the term as it is used in the Bible is clear. J. A. Thompson states:

Whatever the etymology, the Old Testament term *berit* came to mean, that which bound two parties together. It was used, however, for many different types of "bond," both between man and man and between man and God. It has a common use where both parties were men, and a distinctively religious use where the covenant was between God and man. The religious use was really a metaphor based on the common use but with a deeper connotation.<sup>2</sup>



Wilson states:

It is used of God's everlasting covenant of salvation; of the "new covenant" of the gospel, Jeremiah 31:31: of any covenant of God with man, or of man with man; and also of any promise or stipulation, as also of any fixed arrangement, Jeremiah 33:20, or precept to be observed, Jeremiah 34:15. It is also put for the conditions of a covenant, as the Decalogue, Deuteronomy 4:13; 9:9, 11; Isaiah 28:18; and for the sign of a covenant, Genesis 17:13.<sup>3</sup>

The Greek New Testament uses the word *diatheke*. It is used primarily in reference to God's covenant with Abraham or with Moses and to the New Testament of and through Christ. However, the writer of Hebrews compares it to the last will and testament of a person who makes a will (Heb. 9:16, 17). God and Christ have made a will which we must accept and obey to inherit blessings from them.

The Hebrew word *chesed* is closely related to the concept of covenant. Many passages speak of God as one who "keeps covenant [*berit*] and mercy or lovingkindness [*chesed*]" for his covenant people (Deut. 7:9, 12; Neh. 1:5; 9:32).

In 1927 Dr. Nelson Glueck's pioneer study of *chesed* first appeared as a published doctoral dissertation. It was a methodological landmark in the study of the history of ideas of the Bible. Glueck says that *chesed* constitutes the essence of a covenant.<sup>4</sup> Further, he says that God's *chesed* can only be understood as Jehovah's covenantal relationship toward his followers and corresponds to the demands of loyalty, justice, and righteousness and already contains these concepts.<sup>5</sup>

## THE CONCEPT OF COVENANT IN GENESIS

Genesis develops God's covenant in several different situations and with related terminology. The first mention of covenant is in Gen. 6:18. God says to Noah, "I will establish my covenant with you." While scholars debate this, it seems to me that God was referring to a special covenant between him and Noah, perhaps including Noah's family, to save them from the

destruction of the flood by means of the ark. The use of the second person singular seems to place special emphasis upon a personal relationship to Noah and the immediate salvation from the flood.

God's second covenant was with mankind not to destroy them by a flood of waters again. Gen. 9:8-17 says,

And God spake unto Noah and unto his sons with him saying, And I, behold, I am establishing my covenant with you [second personal plural, not second personal singular as in 6:18] and with your seed after you and with all living creatures which are with you, the fowl, the cattle and every beast of the earth, even with all going forth out of the ark, yea, all the living creatures of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you that all flesh shall no more be cut off by the waters of the flood, and there shall not be again a flood to destroy the earth. And God said this is the sign or token of the covenant which I am making between me and all of you and between all living creatures which are with you for generations of the ages. I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign or token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass when I bring a cloud over the earth that the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant which is between me and all of you and between every living creature among all flesh, and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature among all flesh which is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, this is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh which is upon the earth.<sup>6</sup>

God was making a contract with Noah in the first instance to save him and his family from the flood and in the second instance to destroy no more with a flood all creatures of the earth.

Gen. 14:13 refers to a confederacy of Abraham with Mamre



and his brothers. Thus, we see that a covenant might be between man and God, or it also may be man with man or man with men.

Gen. 21:27-32 describes a covenant made by and between Abraham and Abimelech concerning a well. They first had a conflict over Abimelech's servants taking a well from Abraham. Then Abraham gave Abimelech seven lambs, evidently, as payment, perhaps, even additional or unowed payment. These were to be a witness or an evident token or purchase price that the well belonged to Abraham. A part of making the covenant included both of them taking an oath that the well belonged to Abraham and that Abimelech and his men would never take it from him.

The context of Gen. 26:28 describes a similar covenant and oath made by Abimelech, Ahuzzath, and Phichol with Isaac. This was a nonaggression pact for each side not to harm or hurt the other in any way.

Gen. 31:44 mentions a covenant made between Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban. This covenant was memorialized by a heap of stones.

The most significant and long-range covenant is discussed in Gen. 15:18 and in chapter 17. This is the covenant God made with Abraham and his posterity. It is also a covenant which was a prelude to and obtained its fulfillment in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. This covenant is of great significance to us because we are beneficiaries of it and share in the blessings which have resulted from it. From the physical standpoint, we still share in and are blessed by God's covenant with mankind symbolized by the rainbow that we shall not be destroyed by a flood. From the spiritual standpoint, we are blessed beyond measure by God's covenant with Abraham.

Though Abraham's relationship to God began in Ur of Mesopotamia and further developed with his call to go forth from Haran (Gen. 11:27-12:4; Acts 7:1-8), the first formal covenant between God and Abraham is described in Genesis 15. God assured Abraham that one from his own body would be his heir, that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, and that he would give the land of Canaan to him to

possess it. These promises were sealed and ratified by a sacrificial service. In the process of offering the sacrifice, God informed Abraham, who had fallen into a deep sleep, that his descendants would be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. However, God assured Abraham that he would judge the oppressing nation and bring Abraham's seed back to possess Canaan from the river of Egypt to the River Euphrates.

Genesis 17 describes a further amplification of God's covenant with Abraham by the establishment of the covenant of circumcision. The form of the covenant is very interesting, especially in the light of parallel covenants from the ancient Near East: (1) The identity of the Suzerain or Lord: "I am God almighty"; (2) The conditions: "Walk before me and be blameless"; (3) The nature of agreement: "I will establish my covenant between me and you"; (4) The blessings or benefits: "I will multiply you exceedingly. . . . You shall be the father of a multitude of nations. . . . Kings shall come forth from you. . . . My covenant is between me and your descendants throughout their generations. . . . I will give . . . your descendants . . . the land of your sojournings . . . for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God"; (5) The sign or token: "This is my covenant, which you shall keep between me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin and it shall be the sign of the covenant between me and you."

This covenant between God and Abraham becomes the foundation for most of the other things said about covenant throughout the Bible. The covenant is renewed with Isaac and Jacob. After the death of the patriarchs and Joseph and the enslavement of the children of Israel in Egypt, God remembered this covenant and began to move to save Abraham's descendants and bring them back to Canaan (Ex. 2:24; 6:4, 5).

God's covenant with Abraham proceeds naturally to the larger covenant which God gave to Moses and made with the children of Israel at Sinai (Ex. 19:5; 24:7, 8; 31:16; 34:10, 12, 27, 28).

It was because Israel had a covenant with God that they were not to make any covenants with false gods or with pagan



people and nations who were bound by covenants to their false gods (Ex. 23:32; Deut. 7:2).

God's constant relationship with the descendants of Abraham, the children of Israel, and the nation of Israel was determined by whether Israel remembered God and the covenant and obeyed it or whether they forgot the covenant and broke it (Lev. 26:15, 44, 45; Deut. 4:23, 31).

The covenant relationship becomes the foundation of the worship Israel is to give to God as described in Deut. 26:1-19. Deuteronomy 27, 28, and 29 set forth the blessings if the covenant at Sinai or the Mosaic covenant is obeyed and the curses if it is disobeyed.

In essence, the whole history of Israel is determined by this covenant. The faithful priests, judges, kings, and prophets of Israel were constantly calling the people back to the covenant. Apostasy from the covenant meant curses and death. Return to and submission to the covenant meant life and blessings. Jeremiah's great sermon on the covenant in chapter 11 is representative of the plea of God's servants through the ages and of Israel's reaction. Failure to keep the covenant ultimately led to the captivity of both the northern and southern kingdoms. The failure to return to the covenant during the second temple period and during the time of Christ led to Christ's renunciation of all of God's physical and material promises to Israel because they rejected the Messiah as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

### THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT AND THE NEW COVENANT

The inspired and peerless apostle Paul summarizes for us the significance of God's covenant with Abraham for all during the Christian age:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so

that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith

Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:13-29; NASV).

Paul stresses that the complete fullness of the blessings



promised to Abraham come to us in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:14). These blessings come not to descendants of Israel only, as the Jews thought, but they come to the Gentiles also since the promise was that all nations would be blessed in Abraham's seed or descendants (Gal. 3:14-16).

Paul also emphasizes that the promises and original covenant with Abraham were more extensive than the covenant made with Moses and the children of Israel through the law. The law was separate and came 430 years later, and it does not invalidate the covenant of Genesis 12, 15, and 17 ratified by God and does not nullify the promises to all nations, that is, to the Gentiles (Gal. 3:17). Paul makes this same point in Romans 4:9-25.

Thus, the New Covenant by the blood of Christ is the real fulfillment of the promises of God's covenant with Abraham. In Christ, the seed of Abraham, all nations are blessed. In him and only in him and through his blood can sins be atoned and be washed away and can mankind be forgiven and come into a saved state or a covenant of salvation with God.

In Lk. 1:67-79, God uses Zacharias to indicate that the "horn of salvation" from the house of David, whom John was to proclaim, even Jesus Christ, was the one by whom God would "remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to Abraham, our father" (Lk. 1:72, 73). (See also Acts 3:25.)

The writer of Hebrews crowns our study by proving the superiority of God's New Covenant revealed through Christ and sealed with his blood over the Old Covenant revealed through Moses, the fathers, the prophets, and the angels. The writer of Hebrews emphasizes that Christ is the mediator of a better covenant and a New Covenant. This is the covenant prophesied of by Jeremiah. This is the New Testament or Covenant or Will of Christ which comes into force with the death of Christ, the testator (Heb. 8:1-9:28; 10:16, 29; 12:24; 13:20).

The covenant in reality began in the mind of God before the foundation of the earth or the creation of anything (1 Pet. 1:17-20; Mt. 25:34). This covenant was in contemplation when God informed the woman that her seed would bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15). The covenant became generally verbalized in

God's covenant with Abraham that in his seed should all the nations or families of the earth be blessed. The covenant of God became finalized and realized when Christ sealed it with his blood on Calvary and was raised from the dead and declared to be the Son of God and our Lord, Savior, and Messiah. How blessed we are to be children of God and children of Abraham and heirs of God and heirs of Abraham by faith and recipients of the promised blessings of God.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR COVENANT WITH GOD

This study necessitates several important conclusions, observations, and responsibilities. First, if we are Christians, we are in a covenant or contract relationship with God and Christ.

Second, this means that we have ratified, sworn promises and blessings which will accrue to us if and so long as we are faithful to our covenant relationships.

Third, it means that we also have duties and responsibilities incumbent upon us because of our acceptance of this covenant. We must be faithful and loyal in the exercise of our duties and responsibilities. This is a most serious matter.

Fourth, if we are unfaithful to our covenant obligations, we will be cursed more severely than the Israelites were when they were unfaithful to their covenant responsibilities. The writer of Hebrews reminds us:

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Heb. 2:1-3; NASV).

Again he warns us:

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has



regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10:28, 29; NASV).

Fifth, if one has never entered into the covenant relationship with Jesus Christ by being cleansed by his blood and washing away his sins in the act of baptism and putting on Christ, he is without God and without hope in the world and cannot possibly expect to receive any of the blessings and benefits of the covenant.

Sixth, Christians who are in a covenant relationship with Christ and who are fulfilling their covenant obligations and faithfulness have assurance and hope beyond compare. The writer of Hebrews lifts our spirits and assures our hearts when he says concerning this certainty of God's covenant and promises to us:

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater He swore by Himself, saying, "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you." And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a

high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:10-20; NASV).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>F. Furman Kearley, "God's Word in Man's Language," *Gospel Advocate*, June 1990, 26-28.

<sup>2</sup>J. A. Thompson, "Covenant," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 1:790.

<sup>3</sup>William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies* (McLean, Va.: MacDonald Publishing Co., n.d.), 100.

<sup>4</sup>Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), 55.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>6</sup>Translation by F. Furman Kearley.

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## JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH LIKE ABRAHAM'S

Frank Pack

Early in the narratives of the Bible, the name of Abraham appears, first in its shortened form of "Abram" and later in its full form, "Abraham." Abraham received God's command to leave his land, Ur of the Chaldees, and travel to an unknown country. God promised him that he would become "the father of many nations," although he had no offspring by his wife, Sarah. "Abraham believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). He continued his covenant with God who finally blessed him with a son, Isaac. Abraham's great test was in fulfilling God's command that he take Isaac his son and offer him as a sacrifice to God on a distant mountain. God's test showed to all men the depth of faith in both father and son. God is portrayed in the Old Testament as a covenant-making God, in whose covenants God makes promises to undergird the faith of his people. The apostle Paul phrased it this way in Gal. 3:16: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person who is Christ." One of the great elements in the Old Testament faith is the many times Israel had to be corrected and how often they hardened their hearts against the plea of Moses and the prophets.

### PAUL AND THE JEWS

The great book of Romans opens with an account of the moral failures of the Gentile world showing the need of a Savior. But hard on the heels of the Gentile immorality is

Paul's condemnation of the Jews. For the Jews the law provided their means of feeling secure. To receive the benefits of the law one must keep the law. Paul indicts the Jews for failure to obey the law. In breaking the law, the Jew turned his circumcision into uncircumcision. Some Gentiles thus came to be better law keepers than some Jews. The conclusion is that all men, Gentiles and Jews alike, were before God guilty of sin, slaves of evil impulses which hold all in the power of evil forces. Paul pointed out "no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin" (Rom. 3:20). God alone is the Holy One. No one else is holy. Paul was by this plea helping men to see their need of salvation and a Savior. James Moffatt points out, "The Christian is not to be saved because he is good; he is to be good because he is saved, and his goodness is determined by the will of the Lord who has saved him by bringing him into a right relationship to God." Moffatt further contends in his work *Grace in the New Testament*, "Grace is favor and love to the undeserving. Only those who are prepared to acknowledge that they are unworthy, can put faith in the Giver of grace."<sup>1</sup>

After thoroughly exploring the law and its failures, Paul moved in Rom. 3:21ff.: "to a righteousness" which has its source in God himself, yet it is separate and apart from the law but Moses through the law and the prophets of old bore testimony to. "This righteousness" (*dikaiousune*) has its source in God, finds its source in faith in Jesus Christ. It is all encompassing including Jews and Gentiles because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:21-23). Here we encounter a group of cognate words in Greek. No words are more characteristic of Paul's vocabulary. God's righteousness is displayed by the word *dikaiousune* as we have already learned. It also characterizes the uprightness of the believer. The verb *dikaion* means "to justify" and can be translated "to make righteous," "to count as righteous," "to treat as righteous." Paul's teaching on justification means that God treats sinful men as if they were completely virtuous. C. K. Barrett is not so happy about ignoring the Hebrew verb back of the Greek verb *dikaion* which is causative in meaning but could not be weak-



ened to mean "treat as righteous." Barrett wrote further,

It is far better, and more in harmony with Paul's teaching as a whole, to suppose that "to justify" (*dikaion*) does mean "to make righteous," but at the same time to recognize that "righteous" does not mean "virtuous," but "right," "clear," "acquitted" in God's court. Justification then means no legal fiction but an act of forgiveness on God's part, described in terms of the proceedings of a law court. Far from being a legal fiction, this is a creative act in the field of divine-human relations.<sup>2</sup>

### SAVING FAITH—GROWING FAITH

God outlined certain things as events that must occur in preparing Israel to follow God's way. After the Patriarchal Age, hundreds of years would pass before these wandering people would be settled in Palestine. The hero of the period of the patriarchs was Abraham, one of the great men of faith. His faith rested in the Lord and in his word as Abraham's leader. This does not mean that a close examination of the Old Testament will find no question raised. After Abraham's family and servants moved into Palestine, the promise of God that his descendants would be numerous continued to trouble them. Abraham sought various ways of alleviating the puzzling question. Yet, "Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). But Abraham wanted to know how these descendants would get the land promised them. How would a barren wife assist? How would the son of a slave woman assist? Yet God continually held before them his plan, a sufficient plan to encourage them as their goal. God's justification of Abraham did not depend on law. Saving faith accepts the historical testimony as true. It involves trust in the saving power of Christ's blood and the complete yielding of one's self and of one's will to the will of Christ. It is not by the works of the Mosaic law or by any meritorious act or acts that one receives saving faith from God. The New Testament in particular shows that the verb "save" can have more than one time sequence to let one see the active faith. Saving faith can be

experienced by those who have been saved already through God's mercy, but faith can also be continually progressing and growing through this active faith. It can also be focused on the future when all the glory of heaven and eternal life will be experienced by the believer. Thus saving faith cannot only be past faith in Christ, it can also be a continuing faith active and growing, and faith can be consummated in the sight of the glory of the Eternal God in the fellowship of the redeemed. One of the fascinating characteristics of biblical study is so often the rich meaning of terms and metaphors to convey the many shades of understanding in God's Word.

### VOCABULARY OF SALVATION

In Paul's writings in the New Testament, we have a vocabulary of terms connected with salvation. The word "grace" is dominant. We are "justified freely by his grace" through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Justification by grace as a gift shows us how strongly it rests on the freedom men have in the gospel. Paul views "grace" as God's spontaneous, unmerited kindness toward us. The word "redemption" has as its background the money it took to purchase the freedom of a slave. Redemption (*apolutrosis*) holds before our minds the precious beauty of freedom, especially in Christ. This word in Greek means "setting free, deliverance, release." *Hilasterion* has a double meaning. It can be defined as the "means through which we are forgiven." This is the meaning used by the NIV in Rom. 3:25. "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished." In verse 26 Paul continues to display his great faith in God. "He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus." Another possible meaning for *hilasterion* is reflected in Barclay M. Newman's *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, which translates the Greek word here as "the place where sins are forgiven." This translation is part of the material found in



Hebrews. Instead of the Temple of Solomon or Zerubbabel, the author chose the model of the tabernacle. He described the first room or Holy Place with the lampstand, the table, and the consecrated bread. In the second room, called the Most Holy Place, there was the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. The ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the glory overshadowing the place of the atonement (Heb. 9:2-5). Here we have two important and equally interesting uses of the word *hilasterion*. It refers as we have seen to the *means* by which sins are forgiven. It also refers to the *place* where sins are forgiven under the Mosaic covenant. Scholars have differed about the relative importance of these two views, but it is not amiss to include both. Another word connected with salvation by our Lord during his earthly ministry, as well as by Paul, is the word "ransom." Jesus reminded his disciples about his purpose in these words: "For even the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a *ransom* for many" (Mk. 10:45; emphasis mine). *Lutron* is the Greek word which carries this important idea. In addition to Rom. 3:25, Paul used this term to encourage Timothy in his first epistle to Timothy: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time" (1 Tim. 2:5, 6).

Here we have further emphasis on the price paid for our redemption. Justification is God's gift to us, and it comes by grace and not by meritorious works. In summary, since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, we are all guilty of sin and worthy of condemnation. There is no other way for our justification because we are all guilty as sinners. We are justified "by a gift" through his grace, justified as if I had never sinned. Not by works nor by moral excellence does salvation come. Thus we praise God and look forward to the glory that the Son of man has promised.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>James Moffatt, *Grace in the New Testament* (New York: Ray

Long and Richard R. Smith, 1932), 131-32.

<sup>2</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 75-76.

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# ORIGINS: PERSPECTIVES FROM MODERN SCIENCE— THE ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE

Don England

## INTRODUCTION

It is presumptuous for me, in one hour, to address the origin of the universe and, in a second hour, to address the origin of life in the universe. However, the Lectureship Committee thought it necessary and prudent for something to be included on this subject from the scientific perspective. It was not without some trepidation that I accepted the task. In these two lectures I will attempt to show the position taken by modern science on origins and, in doing so, I hope to underscore the rationality of the biblical or Christian alternative.

This is not an attempt to harmonize modern scientific thought with revelation of Scripture. Indeed, I maintain that a harmony of the two at this point in time is impossible. In those matters where pronouncements of science clearly come into conflict with revelation of Scripture, I shall take my stand with Scripture.

It is interesting to note that most of the great scientists who have contributed to our fundamental understanding of the universe have been men who believed in the existence of God: Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Einstein, and, contemporary with us, Stephen W. Hawking of Cambridge University. Newton even wrote a book on fulfillment of Bible prophecy and indulged in Christian apologetics. These scientists, however, refused to specify God's role in creation except that "He did it." Galileo claimed, "The Bible tells us not how the heavens go but how to go to Heaven," and James Jeans spoke of the "finger of God" agitating the primordial ether resulting in the Big Bang



from which the universe originated.

All of us would likely disagree with philosophical materialists who deny God's existence and, therefore, any divine role in creation. Many of us would disagree with those who believe in God but who take a deistic approach and conclude that God's only role was to create natural law and then passively sit back and watch the universe unfold. Most of us believe that Scripture reveals Truth in creation by affirming that God's role in creation was active, and not passive, and that he continues to uphold and sustain all of reality. God spoke matter into existence, and man and woman were supernaturally created in the image of God. Matter, life, and man did not spontaneously evolve; they were supernaturally created.

At this point, I advise that if you want to know the particulars of what the Bible teaches regarding origins, you should attend classes conducted by capable instructors in the exegesis of Genesis and other relevant texts. That is not the purpose of this lecture or the one to follow. My intention is to show what conclusions naturally follow when God's role in origins is either denied or when it is affirmed that God's role was passive in the creation of either the universe or life on earth. First, I will address the vastness of the universe.

### THE VASTNESS OF THE UNIVERSE

One clear, moonless night my then 17-year-old son, Mark, and I prepared to bed down on the floor of the desert in Big Bend National Park. Mark looked up into the sky and said, "Dad, what is that?" Only then did I realize that he had never been particularly impressed by the Milky Way. Without answering his question, I handed him the binoculars and said, "Take a look, Son." I will never forget his response: "Wow!" What had appeared as a luminescent, white cloud or fog stretched across the night sky became a myriad of stars through the binoculars. With the aid of the naked eye and under the best of conditions, we can see about five thousand stars on a clear dark night. Each one of those stars is very much like our sun. However, astronomers estimate that our spirally shaped gal-

axy contains hundreds of thousands of millions of stars much like our sun. Furthermore, it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of millions of galaxies exist in the total known universe.

Relatively speaking, the earth is a tiny speck moving through space at a speed of eighteen miles per second. Its mass is 6,000,000,000,000,000,000 tons; yet the sun has a mass 330,000 times as great. Our solar system consists of our sun and nine planets, with the sun making up 99.8 per cent of the total mass of the solar system. The sun has a diameter of 864,000 miles. If we imagined the sun reduced to the size of a basketball and placed on the goal line of a football field, the earth in proportion would be the size of a BB shot on about the 30-yard line. Jupiter would be the size of a Ping-Pong ball the length of two football fields from the basketball, and Pluto would be smaller than a BB shot almost a mile away. Our nearest star neighbor would be the size of another basketball 5,700 miles away!

Consider this: The Voyager spacecraft was launched from Cape Kennedy in 1977 to explore our solar system and then move on into space beyond our solar system. Two years later, in 1979, Voyager reached Jupiter, and the following year it reached Saturn. Twelve years after launching, Voyager reached Neptune, and in 1990 it reached the edge of our solar system moving at the rate of one million miles a day. In the year A.D. 8,517 (6,526 years from now) Voyager will reach our sun's nearest star neighbor, and in A.D. 20,620 it will reach a second near star neighbor. Over the next million years, Voyager will come relatively close to only thirteen of our sun's nearest star neighbors! The average distance between stars in our neighborhood of the Milky Way galaxy is about six light years. Just as there are clusters of stars within a galaxy, there are clusters of galaxies containing one thousand or more galaxies. A supercluster is a cluster of a cluster of galaxies having perhaps a diameter of 100 million light years.

Our sun is average in size, with some stars having masses one hundred times as great and some having masses one hundred times less. All of earth's energy (except nuclear) comes from the



sun. There it originates as matter is converted into energy during the fusion of hydrogen into helium in keeping with Einstein's equation,  $E = mc^2$ . In this equation  $m$  stands for mass, which is expressed in grams, and  $c$  stands for the speed of light, expressed in centimeters per second. Calculations based on this equation allow us to estimate that the sun is burning up at the rate of about 5 million tons per second but that it will continue to burn at its present intensity for billions of years. The earth receives only a minute portion of the energy produced by the sun; the remainder simply escapes into space. In one second, the sun emits more energy than the human race has consumed through its entire history.

### LOOKING BACK IN TIME

The speed with which light travels is incomprehensible. However, we shall try. Traveling at the speed of 186,000 miles per second, a photon of light would travel a distance comparable to circling the earth seven times in one second at an altitude of fifty miles. This means that light that is, at this very second, falling upon the earth left the surface of the sun about 8½ minutes ago. As you glance at the sun as it nears setting behind the horizon, you are seeing it as it existed 8½ minutes earlier; and, as you look at a star one thousand light years distant, you are seeing that star as it existed when light left its surface in the year A.D. 991. Hence, as we look out into space, we are effectively looking back in time.

As new techniques are developed, we are enabled to see objects farther and farther away. This was one of the purposes to be achieved in the launching of the Hubble space telescope. Astronomers now believe they have detected objects as far away as 15 to 18 billion light years. If these objects are truly this far away, the light we see from them left their surfaces 15 to 18 billions of years ago. Astronomers believe that the universe was created about 15 to 18 billions of years ago.

### THE ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE

Well-known astronomer A. C. B. Lovell of England's Jodrell Bank Observatory made use of the concept of "look back time" in inquiring whether scientists can hope to directly gather data on the single creation event we call the Big Bang. He stated: "As a scientist I cannot discuss this problem of the creation of the primeval atom because it precedes the moment when I can ever hope to infer from observations the conditions which existed."<sup>1</sup> Scientists may be able to look back in time, but the nature of the problem is such that the creation event can never be directly observed. Lovell continues acknowledging that, in pursuit of the nature of the creation event, the science of astronomy must give way to philosophy and theology:

But when we inquire what the primeval atom was like, how it disintegrated and by what means and at what time it was created we begin to cross the boundaries of physics into the realms of philosophy and theology. The important thing at that stage is what you and I think about the situation, this beginning of all time and space.<sup>2</sup>

We appreciate the honesty which prompts an astronomer of Lovell's stature to acknowledge that ultimately we must rely on faith, philosophy, or theology if we care to speak about the origin of the universe. Lovell is not exceptional in this at all. For example, Kaufman, in his widely adopted text *Astronomy*, states:

At the moment of the Big Bang, a state of infinite density filled the universe. Throughout the universe, space and time were completely jumbled up in a condition of infinite curvature like that at the center of a black hole. Thus, we cannot use the laws of physics to tell us exactly what happened at the moment of the Big Bang. These things are fundamentally unknowable. The phrases "before the Big Bang" and "at the *moment* of the Big Bang" are meaningless, because time did not really exist until after that moment. . . . From the moment of the Big Bang, at time  $t = 0$ , to the Plank time  $10^{-43}$  sec. later, all known science







## CONCLUSION

The materialistic faith concludes that our universe spontaneously arose from absolute cold and utter darkness where not even a single photon of light raced across the perfect vacuum of nothingness before there existed even a cubic millimeter of space. The Christian acknowledges the affirmation of Scripture that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A. C. B. Lovell, *The Individual and the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958), 91.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>W. J. Kaufmann III, *Universe* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Co., 1988), 554.

<sup>4</sup>K. F. Kuhn, *In Quest of the Universe* (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1991), 504.

<sup>5</sup>Lovell, 75.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Jastrow, *Red Giants and White Dwarfs* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), 53.

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## ORIGINS: PERSPECTIVES FROM MODERN SCIENCE— THE ORIGIN OF LIFE

Don England

## SPONTANEOUS GENERATION OF LIFE

For two thousand years, the Aristotelean belief that simple forms of life such as flies, maggots, frogs, and mice arise from rotting meat, rotting logs, and barnyard manure was an accepted fact of nature. This was the old theory of spontaneous generation of life, and it was unquestioned, for it was based on obvious common sense observations. The theory presumed to answer one of the greatest enigmas of science and philosophy: the origin of life.

Louis Pasteur, who gave us the germ theory of disease, laid to rest the old theory of spontaneous generation of life in 1862 by a series of experiments he performed demonstrating that microorganisms come only from pre-existing microorganisms. However, modern materialistic or deistic scientists have come back to a new concept of a spontaneous generation of life. Cyril Ponnamperna is one of the advocates of the new theory. However, in the following quotation, he acknowledges the irony of modern scientists recognizing Pasteur's triumph over mysticism in disproving spontaneous generation yet themselves returning to a theory of chemical spontaneous generation to account for life on earth.

In 1864, Pasteur announced his results before the French Academy with the words, "Never will the doctrine of spontaneous generation arise from this mortal blow." It is, perhaps, ironic that we tell beginning students in biology about Pasteur's experiments as the triumph of reason over mysticism yet we are coming back to spontaneous



generation, albeit in a more refined and scientific sense, namely, to chemical evolution.<sup>1</sup>

For the next two hundred years after Pasteur, the dictum "all life from life" was a central dogma of the biological sciences. However, in the early 1920s, largely through the contributions of English biochemist J. B. S. Haldane and Russian biochemist A. I. Oparin, a new theory of spontaneous generation of life began to take shape.

Advocates of the new theory hold that molecular collisions alone on early earth's sterile surface, in a process that is now called "chemical evolution," gave rise to matter of ever increasing order and complexity until finally matter took on new properties which we call "life." The theory is *mechanistic* in that chemical molecular processes alone are postulated to provide the means, and it is *materialistic* and *spontaneous* in that no force outside the material realm, such as a Divine force, is invoked to cause the process to occur.

The word "spontaneous" does not necessarily mean "instantaneous"; rather, it means, "matter moving, on its own, freely and without constraint." Hence, according to the theory, if God exists, he had no part in the creation of life other than the creation of the laws of nature. That this is a correct interpretation of the theory is seen from the writings of A. I. Oparin who is the Russian biochemist regarded as "father of the modern theory on the origin of life." Oparin presents the new theory of spontaneous generation of life as a "dialectical rather than metaphysical" solution to the problem of the origin of life.<sup>2</sup>

To say that the new theory of spontaneous generation of life depends upon a very long series of highly improbable molecular chemical events is an understatement. Harvard University professor and Nobel Prize winner George Wald acknowledged: "I think a scientist has no choice but to approach the origin of life through a hypothesis of spontaneous generation."<sup>3</sup> With almost the same stroke of the pen, he continued:

One has only to contemplate the magnitude of this task (evolution of primeval life from inorganic chemicals) to

concede that the spontaneous generation of a living organism is impossible. Yet here we are—as a result, I believe, of spontaneous generation.<sup>4</sup>

The reason an intelligent scientist like Wald can make such a statement is easy to understand. If one begins with the presupposition that "matter alone exists" or "if God exists He has played no role in creation," then the alternative is quite clear: Life has spontaneously risen from non-life; that is, the impossible has occurred. The creationist, however, does not accept the presupposition that matter alone exists or that God, if he exists, is inactive. Hence, biblical creation is a plausible alternative. That which is naturally impossible has occurred through the supernatural agency of God.

### SIMPLEST LIVING THINGS

The practical impossibility of a spontaneous generation of life is made clear by examining the complexity of the simplest living cells known to exist. The simplest living things are microorganisms called bacteria. Even among the bacteria, of which there are many different species, a great spectrum of complexity is observed. One of the more complex bacteria is *Escherichia coli* which is estimated to contain about 5,000 different kinds of chemical compounds among which are an estimated 3,000 different kinds of proteins and 1,000 different kinds of nucleic acids.<sup>5</sup>

Evolutionists agree that the first living cell supposedly produced by chemical evolution was far less complex than an *E. coli*. Hence, scientists began a search for the simplest living cells among the bacteria. The present-day simplest known bacteria are called "mycoplasmas." Mycoplasmas are bacteria-like organisms that maintain existence through a parasitic relationship with other cells.<sup>6</sup> They are "free living" in that they metabolize and reproduce. Biophysicists speculate that the simplest living thing could conceivably be a hypothetical cell having a diameter approximately one-half that of a daughter



mycoplasma cell. However, within such a structure, they still postulate a staggering complexity:

A cell of this size would have, in its nonaqueous substance, about 1.5 million atoms. Combined in groups of about 20 each, these atoms would form 75,000 amino acids and nucleotides, the building blocks from which the large molecules of the cell's metabolic and reproductive apparatus would be composed. Since these large molecules each incorporate about 500 building blocks, the cell would have a complement of 150 large molecules. This purely theoretical cell would be delicate in the extreme, its ability to reproduce successfully always threatened by the random thermal motion of its constituents.<sup>7</sup>

### THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SPONTANEOUS GENERATION

One should take note that this hypothetical cell represents the *theoretical lower limit of complexity* of the smallest and simplest living thing. Yet it is utterly complex. It is inconceivable, except to the most persistent materialist, that chance factors alone could slowly and spontaneously bring together the component molecules necessary to construct such a cell. It is, indeed, impossible! Even A. I. Oparin, the Soviet "father" of the theory, acknowledged that the practical reality of spontaneous generation is formidable, if not impossible:

It must be understood that no matter how minute an organism may be or how elementary it may appear at first glance it is nevertheless infinitely more complex than any simple solution of organic substances. . . . It would be senseless to expect that such an organization could originate accidentally in a more or less brief span of time from simple solutions or infusions.<sup>8</sup>

Three of the leading voices of authority on the problem of the spontaneous generation of life are George Wald of Harvard University, A. I. Oparin of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences,

and J. D. Bernal of the University of London. We have already seen that Wald and Oparin have made significant admissions to the virtual impossibility of an "accidental" spontaneous origin of life. Yet they believe that it happened. Bernal, in the following quotation, admitted that it is regrettable that life exists on earth because its presence cannot be explained by strict application of the methods of science:

By applying the strict canons of the scientific method to this subject (the spontaneous origin of life), it is possible to demonstrate effectively at several places in the story, how life could not have arisen; the improbabilities are too great, the chances of the emergence of life too small. Regrettably from this point of view, life is here on Earth in all its multiplicity of forms and activities and the arguments have to be bent around to support its existence.<sup>9</sup>

Close examination of the new hypothesis of spontaneous generation of life reveals the reasons why the chief proponents of the theory question its validity. The materialistic origin-of-life hypothesis is believed by the materialists to have occurred on earth's sterile surface billions of years ago and is summarized in Figure 1:<sup>10</sup>

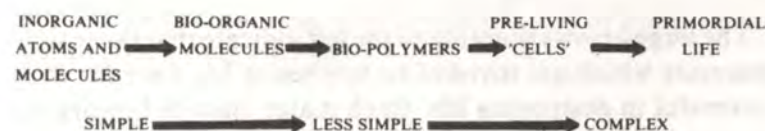


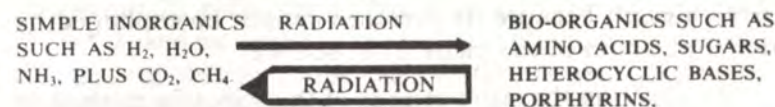
Figure 1: The Materialistic Origin-of-life Hypothesis

The organization of matter from the simple to the complex is a common occurrence *where life already exists*. Growth of a seed into a plant or the development of an individual from a fertilized egg are common examples of the process. However, to suggest that life spontaneously arose from non-life even once on a sterile planet which was initially very hostile to the existence of life is quite another matter. In order to compen-

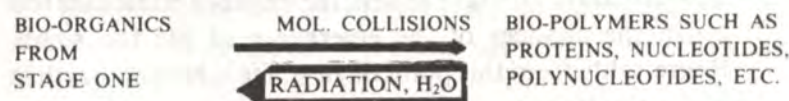


sate, the materialists suggest that the process occurred step-wise as is illustrated in Figure 2:<sup>11</sup>

#### STAGE ONE: ORIGIN OF BIO-ORGANICS FROM INORGANICS



#### STAGE TWO: ORIGIN OF BIO-POLYMERS (MACROMOLECULES)



#### STAGE THREE: ORIGIN OF PRIMORDIAL LIFE

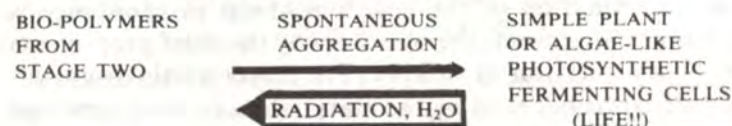


Figure 2: A Three-Stage Hypothesis of the Origin of Life

The large arrows pointing to the left indicate that those same processes which are invoked to synthesize life were far more successful in destroying life. Each major class of bio-organic chemicals that is needed to proceed in the synthesis of life is far more easily destroyed by water and energy than it is synthesized. In other words, dissolution far prevails over synthesis. Wald summarized the enigmatic situation as follows: "The situation we must face is that of a patient Penelope waiting for Odysseus, yet much worse: each night she undid the weaving of the preceding day, but there a night could readily undo the work of a year or a century."<sup>12</sup>

Physiologists Green and Goldberger acknowledged that the spontaneous process in which we are interested is so improbable that available evidence does not provide a basis for con-

cluding that life arose on this planet: "However, the macro-molecule-to-cell transition is a jump of fantastic dimensions, which lies beyond the range of testable hypothesis. In this area, all is conjecture. The available facts do not provide a basis for postulating that cells arose on this planet."<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is apparent from these considerations that convincing evidence that life "accidentally" or "spontaneously" arose any time in the past is lacking. However, we are here. The materialist who *believes* that only matter exists responds to this observation with the conclusion that life exists on planet Earth because the impossible occurred: spontaneous generation of life. The Christian, on the other hand, *believes* that God is transcendent to matter and that he created life on earth. Therefore, the point of tension between the Christian and the materialist is not because the facts of science conflict with Christian faith; the point of tension is due to materialistic faith conflicting with Christian faith. George Wald's claim, as well as that of other materialists, that "One has only to wait: time itself performs miracles"<sup>14</sup> is a gross overstatement. The overstatement, however, is necessary because it undergirds their faith in matter. The fact is that time does nothing in and of itself. *Life did not evolve; it was created!*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>C. Ponnamperuma, *The Origins of Life* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), 21.

<sup>2</sup>A. I. Oparin, *Origin of Life on the Earth* (New York: Academic Press, 1957), xi, xii.

<sup>3</sup>George Wald, "The Origin of Life," in *The Molecular Basis of Life*, ed. R. H. Haynes and P. C. Hanawalt (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Co., n.d.), 339.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>A. L. Lehninger, *Biochemistry*, 2d ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 1975), 5.

<sup>6</sup>Bruce Alberts and others, *Molecular Biology of the Cell* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1983), 10.

<sup>7</sup>H. Morowitz and M. Tourtellotte, "The Smallest Living Cells,"



*Scientific American*, 206 (March 1962), 117.

<sup>8</sup>A. I. Oparin, *Origin of Life* (New York: Dover Publications, 1953), 246.

<sup>9</sup>J. D. Bernal, *The Origin of Life* (New York: Universe Books, 1967), xv.

<sup>10</sup>Don England, *A Christian View of Origins* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1972; Copyright now by Author), 51.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>12</sup>Wald, 342.

<sup>13</sup>D. E. Green and R. F. Goldberger, *Molecular Insights Into the Living Process* (New York: Academic Press, 1967), 403, 407.

<sup>14</sup>Wald, 6.

## MAN IN GOD'S IMAGE (1)

Tom Eddins

The creation account of Genesis moves inexorably toward its culmination in the creation of mankind. While no attempt is made to denigrate any nonhuman aspect of God's creative activity, man is undoubtedly the pinnacle of the creation and the being for whom the rest of the world provides a habitation. Both the story of the days of creation in chapter 1, with man created on the last day of God's activity, and the recapitulation in chapter 2, recounting and elaborating the appearance of man, point to man as the focal point of the divine work.

While a complete biblical anthropology cannot be derived from the Genesis account, what one source has called man's "crowning glory,"<sup>1</sup> is no doubt described in Gen. 1:26, 27 when God declares his intent to make man "in our image, in our likeness," and proceeds to do so. While man shares some attributes with other beings in the creation (e.g., Gen. 2:7 describes man as an animate being, the same Hebrew phrase used of water and land creatures in 1:20, 24), his being in the image and likeness of God constitutes him as unique. It provides him with attributes (and a status) that set him apart and elevate him to a position transcending the remainder of the creation and endowing him with certain ethical rights protecting him from the malicious acts of others against him.

The concept of man as in the image or likeness of God has been interpreted many ways. Although the present concern (i.e., the focus of the present study) is with *the implication of the fact* that man is in God's image/likeness, a preliminary survey of ways in which the idea has been understood seems to be in order.



## SOME STATISTICAL INFORMATION

The word translated "image" (*tselem*) appears seventeen times in the Old Testament. Other than concerning the idea discussed here, it is used of such things as the golden images of "tumors" and "mice" in 1 Sam. 6:5ff. or even of the idols of ancient paganism in Amos 5:26. Occasionally, the idea is of an empty semblance, as in Ps. 39:6.<sup>2</sup> The word translated "likeness" (*demut*) appears twenty-five times with general meanings such as likeness, similitude, or resemblance.<sup>3</sup> The interpretation below attempts to understand the meaning in the passages under question here.

## INTERPRETATIONAL APPROACHES

Before positing an exact meaning for the words in question, a preliminary inquiry must be made as to whether or not the "image" and the "likeness" are to be understood as identical. There is a line of interpretation which differentiates the two and contends that one (the image) is the constant possession of man while the other (the likeness) was lost at the fall. (In light of such passages as Gen. 9:6 and Jas. 3:9, it is a practical impossibility to argue that man lost God's "image" at the fall.) Without extensive discussion, it will be noted that in this lesson the terms will be taken to be what one author has called "the duplication of synonyms."<sup>4</sup> This same sort of duplication appears in Gen. 5:3, although here the reference is to a *human* father and son. While it is true that each sometimes appears alone in a verse ("image" in Gen. 1:27 and 9:6; "likeness" in Gen. 5:1), the idea that they are synonymous seems the best approach.

Interpretational approaches to the image/likeness run from what might be loosely designated the "concrete" to the "abstract." Some expositors seem to feel a compulsion to argue for some aspects of both. Concrete approaches tend toward understanding the image/likeness in terms of physical characteristics while abstract interpretations emphasize such attributes as rationality, personality, etc.

A helpful beginning in understanding the words or phrase perhaps comes from G. W. Bromily when he observes that "man is said to be made *in* the image of God, not to be the image of God."<sup>5</sup> While he concedes that "too much stress should not be laid on this distinction," the fact that God is the true original and man is in a sense the copy has some important implications:

- (1) that man is not to create God in his own image
- (2) that he is to learn his true nature from God and not vice versa, and
- (3) that Christ, who is the express image of God, is the true original of man, so that even apart from the fall and restoration man would still have borne the image of God.<sup>6</sup>

Proceeding to the two most dominant interpretation types we may begin with a look at attempts at concrete approaches. Assuming the paganistic background of ancient times, and assuming that Genesis must somehow fall into this mold, many have understood that the image/likeness must somehow relate to what might be described as material resemblance. Cuthbert A. Simpson explicitly asserts that "the idea of man being created *in the image of God* is probably dependent on Babylonian mythology."<sup>7</sup> A good summary of this general view (although it is not one with which the author concurs) comes from Norman Porteous:

At one extreme are those who take the words . . . [image and likeness] in the most strictly concrete sense and declare the meaning to be either that man is a concrete image of God in respect of literal physical resemblance, or that he is made after an actual concrete model or image of God.<sup>8</sup>

It is to be admitted that the words involved can (technically) bear such an interpretation. Appeal might be made to the similarity in wording of Gen. 5:3: "When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth." Regarding this passage, one author has noted, "This makes it certain that physical resemblance must not be excluded."<sup>9</sup> Appeal has also been made to God's



appearance in theophanies, presumably contending that such appearances give God some sort of human form (cf. Gen. 18:1ff.; etc.).

However, against this view is the prevailing biblical concept that God is by his nature noncorporeal. "Physical resemblance is ruled out, for God is not represented as having a human form, or any other material form, except in theophany or incarnation."<sup>10</sup> Theophanies and the incarnation are to be understood as "special instances," not the general rule. Indeed, the idea of the incarnation itself conveys the thought of the incorporeal assuming, at least briefly, an entirely different form. God appearing in the image/likeness of man is seen as something special.

Bromiley again summarizes what might be called the abstract view in the following words:

At the other extreme are the interpretations which depart entirely from the concrete meaning of . . . [*tselem*] and offer a purely spiritual interpretation, using words like "personality," "self-consciousness," "self-determination," "immortality" . . . "reason," "ability to pass judgment," "freedom of the will," "moral capacity."<sup>11</sup>

Numerous examples of this view could be listed/elaborated, but the following is an excellent example:

What however is meant by the "image of God" which man is thus said to bear? It is (1) something which evidently forms the ground and basis of his entire preeminence above animals; (2) it is something which is transmitted to his descendants (vv. 1, 3, ix. 6), and belongs therefore to man in general, and not solely to man in a state of primitive innocence; (3) it relates from the nature of the case, to man's immaterial nature. It can be nothing but the gift of *self-conscious reason*, which is possessed by man, but by no other animal. In all that is implied by this,—in the various intellectual facilities possessed by him; in his creative and originative power, enabling him to develop and make progress in arts, in sciences, and in civilization

generally; in the power of rising superior to the impulses of sense, of subduing and transforming them, of mounting to the apprehension of general principles, and of conceiving intellectual and moral ideals; in the ability to pass beyond ourselves, and enter into relations of love and sympathy with our fellowman; in the possession of a moral sense, or the faculty of distinguishing right and wrong; in the capacity for knowing bad, and holding spiritual communion with Him,—man is distinguished fundamentally from other animals, and is allied to the Divine nature; so that, wide as is the interval separating him from the creator, he may nevertheless, so far as his mental endowments are concerned, be said to be an "image," or adumbration, of Him.<sup>12</sup>

The above statement leaves much for explanation, but two additional factors need to be mentioned. First, the immediate context suggests that man in God's image has a "close connection" with the idea of a ruling over the lower creation, or the ability to do so. . . .<sup>13</sup> God is the supreme ruler of all creation, but man (in his image) is the one who is to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:28b). The implications of this responsibility are quite significant.

One final thought in this interpretation summary seems inescapable. Both Old Testament and New Testament alike indicate that man in God's image has a status that precludes treating him in certain ways. Gen. 9:6 indicates that one man should not kill another *because/for* man has been made in the image of God. James finds it unthinkable that the human tongue could be used both to praise God and to curse man, "who have been made in God's likeness" (Jas. 3:9). These verses point to God's image/likeness endowing man with a certain dignity which makes certain actions against him inherently ethically unthinkable.<sup>14</sup> As will be discussed in the next lesson, "the writer intends by the phrase 'image of God' to express in some way man's peculiar dignity."<sup>15</sup>



## CONCLUSION

While man is "a little lower than the heavenly beings" he is also "crowned . . . with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5; NIV). He is not God, but he bears God's image/likeness. "As Spirit, God is invisible and incorporeal, and cannot be localized in space and time; the unique bearer of the divine image, in the creative world, is man himself."<sup>16</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Theodore Friedman, "Man," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth and others (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 11:844.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 853-54.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>4</sup>S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen and Co., 1904), 15.

<sup>5</sup>G. W. Bromily, "Image of God," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromily (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 2:803.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Cuthbert A. Simpson, *Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), 1:277.

<sup>8</sup>Norman W. Porteous, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 2:683.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Bromiley, 803.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Driver, 15.

<sup>13</sup>Porteous, 684.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. John T. Willis, *Genesis, The Living Word Commentary*, vol. 2 (Austin, Tex.: Sweet Publishing Co., 1979), 88, 89, 180.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 683.

<sup>16</sup>C. F. H. Henry, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. E. F. Harrison (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1960), 277.

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## MAN IN GOD'S IMAGE (2)

Tom Eddins

As the culmination of the account recorded in Genesis 1—2, man is "the peak of creation."<sup>1</sup> Although not divine himself, he was intended by God to be, and is, "in our image, in our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). As such he is unique in the creation, enjoying a status that is afforded no other creature. As noted above, there is a sense in which he is God's surrogate—one having both the opportunity and the responsibility for exercising dominion over the creation. Man in God's image is not totally defined by the task of ruling, but his dominion is inextricably connected with his formation in the divine image. The psalmist exclaims:

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands;  
you put everything under his feet:

all flocks and herds,

and the beasts of the field.

the birds of the air,

and the fish of the sea,

all that swim the paths of the seas.

(Ps. 8:5-8; NIV)

One modern writer has observed:

Here for the first time, in 1:26, readers are informed of God's purposes in his creative activity. Up to this point, no reason has been given why God did what he did. But here, the Scriptures give us a reason. Humans are made to govern—to rule over the zoological realm as God rules



over all things. The *imago dei*, the likeness of God, consists, accordingly, of all those powers and activities required for fulfilling this job description, this rule to which we are appointed. And of course it includes the very rule itself.<sup>2</sup>

Interesting though a study may be concerning the *meaning* of man in the image/likeness of God, of at least equal value are the *implications* that this fact has for our lives. Reflection upon Scripture would lead to the understanding of at least the following serious implications.

### MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROPER MAINTENANCE OF THE WORLD

When emphases of our modern world become prominent, it is tempting for students of Scripture to "jump on the bandwagon" and go out and find passages that lend themselves to an interpretation which fits in with our dominant thought. But this is not to say that no modern emphases have any status in Scripture. To the contrary, the above discussion of man and his God-given position of ruler and dominion speaks to man's responsibility for the care of his environment. The modern ecological emphasis, with its concern for a pure and safe habitat, is certainly in line with man's role as ruler.

Prior to the creation of man himself, God created a world that was good/very good (cf. Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). With particular reference to the Garden of Eden man was "to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15). It was and continues to be a habitat that potentially provides for man's physical needs and gives him the opportunity to demonstrate his love for and faith in God. Sins such as greed and maliciousness have sometimes led humans to pollute the environment or destroy the delicate balance that exists in nature. Surely man's dominion over the creation was never intended to be a despotic tyranny that either pillages the countryside (defacing the beauty of God's creation) or indiscriminately and uselessly kills anything that might be within target range. While man is to be dominant

and the physical world is to serve as a providing environment for this earthly pilgrimage, one should not conclude that abuse is not possible. Much better would be man's acceptance of the implication of his position as ruler in God's image and his exercise of his faculties that lead to a biblically "good" realm.

### MAN AND HIS WORTH

While the danger of pride constantly lurks within man, a polar opposite or antithetical extreme also appears in the lives of some people. Although man is a sinner and often falls victim to the frailties that beset him in life's pilgrimage, he should never forget that he is a creature in the image of God. Modern psychologists can sometimes identify human problems that arise as a result of low self-esteem or an unfortunate non-recognition of self-worth. The desire to feel accepted and valuable often leads people to do things that they well know are sinful. However their desire for acceptance and the corresponding feeling of self-worth may win out over the guilt they know will follow. One writer has called low self-esteem "Satan's Deadliest Weapon."<sup>3</sup> He suggests that low self-esteem paralyzes potential, destroys dreams, ruins relationships, and sabotages Christian service.<sup>4</sup>

The trap of arrogance and pride should be avoided at all costs. But let us never forget our God-given worth. In a little different way John emphasizes this by writing "How great is the love that the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 Jn. 3:1; NIV). But in addition, every person can also reflect upon the fact that he is created in the image of God.

### THE TREATMENT OF OTHERS

The fact that man is in God's image also has stated biblical implications for our ethical relationships. Man is a creature/being of dignity and, as such, should never be treated in certain respects. Note the following passages:



Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; *for* in the image of God has God made man (Gen. 9:6; emphasis mine).

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be (Jas. 3:9, 10).

The authors of Scripture sometimes seem to contemplate certain actions and their unarticulated but real response is: "Unthinkable!"<sup>5</sup> In our context the fact of man in the image of God renders (explicitly) murder and cursing in this category. It is as though God asks, "How could you possibly contemplate murdering one created in my image?!" James correspondingly could be understood as asking, "How could you dare to use the same member of the body that praises God to curse men?!" Indeed, he goes on to add that such is as nonsensical as imagining fresh and salt water coming from the same spring, a fig tree bearing olives, or a grapevine bearing figs! Our interpersonal relationships would be considerably enhanced if we could only come to view others as they rightly are—creatures in the image of God.

## CONCLUSION

Man is a marvel in many ways. He has been analyzed, scrutinized, probed, and evaluated in every conceivable way. But no analysis does him justice and no description is complete until he is seen as "in the likeness and image of God."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Theodore Friedman, "Man," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth and others (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 11:844.

<sup>2</sup>Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 49.

<sup>3</sup>David A. Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1981), 48.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 49ff.

<sup>5</sup>For a parallel thought, cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20.

## GENESIS AND INTEGRITY (1)

Phillip McMillion

Recently, after a Sunday morning Bible class, one of the class members came over to me and said, "The more I study the Bible, the more amazed I am that those people were just like us. They were not perfect either." I believe that reflects the thinking of many people today. As people study the Scriptures more closely, they are seeing that the characters in the Bible are presented with both their good points and their faults. Perhaps that is a healthy attitude. If we are to identify with the people of the Bible, they must be seen as genuine.

A part of this change may be the result of changes within our society. There is a tendency today to point out the weaknesses and imperfections of all our heroes from the past. A certain amount of this is valid and healthy. On the other hand, it is easy to get caught up in hero-bashing. There is a tendency to try to pull everyone down to the level of the lowest elements in society. When that happens, we destroy the incentive for raising our level of behavior. It is easy to destroy our ideals and have nothing left as a model. That is certainly not our aim here, and we do not want to be caught up in the extremes of some anti-hero crusade.

## BALANCED LIFE

In this lesson we want to look at the lives of some of the characters in Genesis in order to see what we can learn from them. We want to look at them as they are presented in the Scriptures with both their positives and negatives. The Scriptures present the people in Genesis as trying to balance the



various forces in their lives. In seeking this balance, they had to integrate various facets of life and society just as we do today. When they achieved this balance or equilibrium, they were successful in leading well-integrated lives. It is in this unique sense of integrity that I would like to examine some of the material in Genesis.

I think all of us would agree that it is much easier for us to maintain our equilibrium and to live lives of balance and integrity when we have a solid home life as a foundation. Naturally, our families contribute to that, and we can thank the Lord for good Christian families. Another thing that contributes to this balance is a sense of security. A part of that security for most of us is a house with things in a reasonable order. We have our side of the driveway that we always use. We know where the furniture is if we get up in the dark. We know where the tools are if we need to fix something.

### ABRAHAM

Now picture Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans. He has his side of the driveway where he always parks his donkey. He knows just where everything is, and his life is in a nice comfortable balance. Now God calls him and tells him to pack up a few things and move. "How long will I be traveling, God?" he asks. For the rest of your life, Abraham, we can say. So much for all the comforts of home. Now comes the real challenge. Can Abraham live an integrated, balanced life without the material foundations? I do not know about you, but I think that would be tough. When we go camping, I start feeling unsettled after just a few days of packing and unpacking. Here is Abraham who spends the rest of his life as a sojourner and a nomad. In spite of this, he lives a life of faith and integrity. I think that is a great accomplishment.

Another beautiful example of balance and integrity in Abraham's life is found in Genesis 13. Abraham was living quietly in the territory of his allies Mamre the Amorite and his brothers, Eshcol and Aner, when he received word that his nephew Lot had been kidnapped by the warring kings. This

certainly would have been enough to send most people into a panic, and would clearly upset the balance of peaceful everyday life.

When Abraham heard the news that Lot had been taken captive, he summoned his men and set out in pursuit of the enemy. Abraham carefully organized his forces and at the right moment routed the kidnappers.

This could easily have been the end of the story. The kinsman in danger has been rescued and the enemy defeated. The story does not stop there, however. The remainder of chapter 14 illustrates how Abraham returned from battle, met with Melchizedek, and discussed the spoils from the battle. Abraham refused to keep any of the treasure for himself. He did not allow success in battle or praise from someone like Melchizedek to upset the balance and equilibrium of his life. He could have had great treasure after this victory, but he chose to turn it down. He did consider his three friends and asked that treasure be given to Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre.

Even the presentation of the account as it is related in Genesis 14 contributes to this sense of peace and balance that characterizes Abraham. When we first meet Abraham in this chapter, he is living quietly by the oaks of his friend Mamre the Amorite, along with two brothers, Eshcol and Aner. The news of the danger to Lot adds a sense of tension to the account. The reader wonders, What will happen to Lot, and what will Abraham do? A sense of excitement builds as Abraham moves quickly into action. This part of the narrative rushes forward propelled by a series of action verbs. Abraham led forth his trained men, and he went in pursuit. When he overtook the fleeing kings, he divided his forces, routed the enemy, and pursued them again. At last, he brought back Lot and all his family as well as the goods that had been taken. The defeat of the kings and the rescue of Lot form the climax or high point of the story. At this point, the tension begins to relax as the events gradually unfold and move back to a state of rest. The calm discussion in verses 19 through 24 contributes to the unwinding of the narrative. The whole chapter finally returns to a calm equilibrium with the mention of the three friends of Abraham.



Notice that in verse 24 they are mentioned in reverse order from the way they were introduced in verse 13. Their introduction in verse 13 begins this section, and now they appear again in verse 24 as if to signal that the story has gone full cycle. The section moves from rest to tension to climax to unwinding to rest. In one sense, the very style of the material contributes to the message that is being conveyed. Abraham's life continues to reflect a certain balance and equilibrium even in the face of enormous pressures and challenges.

It is easy to imagine how many of us might react in such a situation. Much of modern society seems to move from one crisis to another. People are in a constant state of panic, and they never seem to experience that calm that was at the center of Abraham's life. Then we have a whole new problem when we look at the offer that Melchizedek made in verse 21. Abraham was offered the opportunity to keep all the spoils or riches of war for himself. Now the taking of spoil after a victory was not unusual in the ancient world. It was the expected thing. This was how leaders normally financed their wars and paid their soldiers. What is unusual is that Melchizedek did not demand more of a share. He offered it all to Abraham. How many people have been ruined by getting a little taste of material wealth—perhaps a lot less than Abraham could have had. People's lives are sometimes thrown out of balance for years by a little material success. Some people never recover their equilibrium and never return to their senses. Abraham was not thrown off balance by this. He showed his true integrity in the face of perhaps one of his greatest temptations. He continued to live a life of integrity and balance.

In chapters 15 and 17, we see the initiation of God's covenant with Abraham. This is surely one of the high points of the whole book of Genesis. It is also extremely important for the topic of integrity because it is this covenant which provides the real basis for Abraham's integrity. This covenant also reaches beyond Abraham and includes all his descendants as well, but it is in the life of Abraham that the initial influence of this covenant is most clearly seen.

God assured Abraham that he would be with him and be his

God. The Lord also promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan and to multiply his descendants. When Abraham asked how he was to know that these promises were true, he was given a special sign to confirm what God had said. This sign is found in the rather strange events recorded in Gen. 15:9-21. Abraham was told to take several animals, cut them in half, and lay the pieces opposite each other. No sacrifice is mentioned, and many readers have wondered at the meaning of this action. The key seems to be found in Gen. 15:17, 18. The flame which passes between these pieces of the animals represents the presence of God who is making this covenant. God is binding himself to do just as he has agreed in this covenant. The words of verse 18 confirm that the covenant is indeed finalized. A similar practice has been found in the description of other covenants from the Ancient Near East. The two parties making a covenant would slaughter an animal and then bind themselves with an oath. Their statement would suggest, "May the same thing happen to me as it has just happened to this animal if I do not keep this covenant." That is the symbolism that is behind this action in Genesis 15.

It was this promise of God's care and protection that enabled Abraham to lead a life of integrity. He did not do this by his own strength, but he did it through the assurance that the God of the covenant would be with him at all times. Abraham faced many difficult situations in his life. The episode with Hagar and Sarah and their attempt to secure an heir was a major problem. This would have been enough to ruin the balance in anyone's life. Even in this turmoil, however, God reassured Abraham that he would keep his promise. Abraham did not need to worry or to try to help God out in this case. God would keep his covenant, but he would do so in his own good time and in his own way. This was a difficult lesson to accept, but Abraham was learning to trust in the Lord.

Abraham's life as an integrated life of balance is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the well-known story of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis. In this chapter Abraham is asked to do something that is almost incomprehensible, and yet he follows God's command in complete obedience. God calls



Abraham, and in Gen. 22:2 he gives him the command to go and sacrifice his son, Isaac. This command appears especially strange in light of the great lengths already taken to provide this special son to Abraham. We may speculate about the trauma and the psychological agony that Abraham suffered as he wrestled with this command, but it will be simply our speculation. The text of Genesis 22 gives no hint about Abraham's psychological state. We do not even know if he told Sarah the purpose of his trip. The text simply tells us that Abraham rose early the next morning and began to make preparations to carry out God's command. We can only imagine what most of us would do if we were in such a situation. I suspect that we might find a lot of reasons to delay doing what Abraham did. Abraham's action cannot be dismissed as something rash that he rushed into before he had time to think it over. Gen. 22:4 reports that it was the third day of the journey before they could see the place in the distance. Abraham had three days to consider his obedience to the Lord. If he had wanted to change his mind or second-guess God, he certainly had ample time to do that. Genesis mentions no such hesitation on Abraham's part. The Bible does not tell us what Abraham thought, but it does tell us what he did. He moved forward toward the fulfillment of God's command.

The chapter moves steadily toward the expected sacrifice as Abraham leaves the servants behind and continues his journey with Isaac. We can only wonder at the division of the burdens. Isaac carries the wood, but Abraham carries the fire and the knife. Could it be that these are too dangerous for the boy to carry? We can imagine Abraham's anguish when Isaac asks about the lamb for the sacrifice, but the passage gives no insight into Abraham's thoughts. He simply replies that God will provide the lamb. Some have suggested that Abraham already knew that God would spare Isaac and provide a lamb. However, this would seem to destroy the real impact of the test. At this point, we simply cannot see into the mind of Abraham.

The passage comes to a climax as Abraham prepares to plunge the knife into his own son. At the last possible moment, God calls to Abraham to stop. Abraham has demonstrated his

faithfulness through his actions in this most difficult of all situations. One later tradition from outside the Bible suggests that Abraham lived the remainder of his life as an angry, bitter man because of what God had done to him. There is not a trace of this idea in the Scriptures. This event, in fact, is not mentioned again in the material on Abraham. This did not sour Abraham on life or upset the equilibrium of his existence. He continued to live a life of faith relying on God's guidance in all that he did.

Abraham is not presented as perfect in his behavior. He did not tell the whole truth about Sarah on at least two occasions. He laughed when God promised him a son in Gen. 17:17. But even in these situations, Abraham did not turn away from God. He maintained his relationship with the Lord, and that gave him the stability in his life that kept him in balance. Abraham was able to maintain the proper perspective on all the highs and lows in life because he stayed close to God.

## JOSEPH

Another excellent example of this same principle of integrity is the life of Joseph as it is found in Genesis 37—50. The life of Joseph certainly exhibits both the heights and the depths that a person can experience. He went from favorite son to slave and from prisoner to the palace of Egypt. The one element that was consistent throughout the life of Joseph was his faith in God. He always relied on God to help him through the difficulties that he faced. He could easily have given up hope and drifted into depression and despair. Joseph was able to maintain the balance and equilibrium in his life because he had the solid anchor of faith to help him overcome all the storms that he faced.

What about our own lives today? Do we have the kind of balanced lives that God intends for us to have? Are all the different parts of life as well integrated as they should be? I am afraid that all too often our lives are out of balance and sometimes out of control. We move from one crisis situation to the next. We are constantly reacting to outside pressures which



control us rather than being in control of our own lives. Perhaps we need to go back to the basics, back to the foundations of faith and trust that can give us the equilibrium that we need so desperately today.

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## GENESIS AND INTEGRITY (2)

Phillip McMillion

The first lesson focused on the integrity of some of the people in Genesis, especially Abraham and Joseph. This approach to the various characters in the Bible has been used often in the past to look at the examples of people from Old Testament times. The writer of Hebrews 11 cites many examples from the Old Testament, so clearly there is benefit to this approach. This is not, however, the only way to look at the Old Testament. In this second lesson, I would like to consider the integrity of another figure in Genesis. The figure I want us to consider is God. Now I realize that it might sound a bit unusual to talk about the integrity of God, and I certainly do not mean this in any disrespectful way. I believe that we can learn some important lessons by looking at the characteristics of God presented in Genesis.

Under the broad category "integrity," this lesson will include concepts such as steadfastness, reliability, and trustworthiness. At first glance, it appears to be stating the obvious to refer to the integrity of God. It may well be assumed that God is reliable and trustworthy. The Old Testament, however, places great emphasis on the integrity of God. This is the foundation for much of what happens in Genesis.

### ISRAEL'S NEIGHBORS

When one looks at the nature of the various gods and goddesses of the nations around Israel in the ancient world, it becomes apparent that the integrity of God should not be taken for granted. Many of these other gods were presented as fickle



and capricious; they could change their minds and shift their favors as their whims or fancies dictated. In the mythology of these foreign nations, humans were constantly in danger of being tricked or fooled by some deity who had suddenly turned from friend to foe. When one considers this background, perhaps the emphasis on the integrity of God in the Old Testament begins to make more sense after all.

### GOD IN GENESIS

One of the key terms used in the Old Testament to express God's integrity is the Hebrew word *hesed*. This term is often translated as "steadfast love," but it carries a much broader connotation than this. In modern culture, we tend to think of love as a feeling or an emotion. The biblical concept, however, is demonstrated by one's actions. This concept of an active demonstration of this integrity and reliability is seen in Gen. 21:23, where Abimelech asks Abraham to promise that he will not deal falsely with him but will deal with him loyally. The term used here is deal according to *hesed*, "steadfast love." This trait is to be seen in the way one person acts toward another. This passage also shows that this is the opposite of dealing falsely. That gives us some basic insight into this terminology that helps to explain some other passages.

Genesis 24 relates the account of Abraham's sending his servant to Mesopotamia to find a wife for Isaac. In both verses 12 and 14, the servant asks God to show steadfast love to his master Abraham. Naturally, what the servant is requesting is to complete his mission successfully. This requires finding an appropriate wife for Isaac, one who is willing to return and marry him. Here, too, God is asked to demonstrate his steadfast love in an active way. This show of God's steadfast love also suggests another aspect of God's nature. God had earlier promised to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation. In Genesis 24 Abraham's only son, Isaac, was not married. In order for God's promise to be fulfilled, Isaac needed a wife, and he needed to begin a family. God would be demonstrating the reliability and trustworthiness of his word when he helped the

servant to successfully complete his mission. This is simply one more example of God's working throughout Genesis to prove the reliability of his promises.

This emphasis on reliability is emphasized again in Gen. 24:49 through the combination of two terms, *hesed* and '*emet*. The second term suggests truthfulness or faithfulness and serves to modify the term steadfast love. One translation uses the phrase "deal loyally and truly," and this certainly gives the proper emphasis. God is indeed a God who can be trusted. He is one who deals loyally and truly with his people. He can be relied upon to keep the promises that he has made.

These same two terms are linked again in Gen. 32:10. There Jacob prays to God and states that he is not worthy of all the steadfast love and faithfulness that God has shown to him. Jacob is referring to the ways that God has blessed him during the years he had been working for Laban. Jacob remembered God's promise in verse 12, "I will do you good, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea. . . ." God had made these promises and had fulfilled them in the life of Jacob. Once again, God had demonstrated that he was a God who could be trusted to keep his word. God was indeed a God of integrity. During his long years of service to Laban, it would have been easy for Jacob to doubt the promises of God. Jacob could have questioned whether God was really trustworthy or not. The powerful message that is brought out is that God did prove himself to be one who acted to fulfill his word.

Another important passage that illustrates the integrity of God is found in Gen. 39:21. In this passage, the young man Joseph has just been unjustly accused and cast into prison in Egypt. If anyone could have questioned the fairness of their treatment, surely it was Joseph. If anyone could have questioned whether God was still with him, Joseph could have done that. The message of Gen. 39:21 is that God was still with Joseph. When things looked darkest from a human perspective, the Lord was still there. When family could no longer be trusted, the Lord was trustworthy. When human masters were unreliable, the master of the universe was still reliable. Throughout the story of Joseph, over and over again God is



with Joseph raising him up and guiding him through difficult situations. God's integrity in keeping his word and in caring for his charges is demonstrated over and over again.

One could start at the very beginning of Genesis and see that God is one who loves, cares, and provides for his creation. The creation itself demonstrates that God is careful to provide for all the needs of the creatures that are created. This adds to the picture of God as one who is reliable and trustworthy. God is a God of integrity. When God makes a covenant with Noah, that covenant is reliable because God is a God of integrity. When God makes a covenant with Abraham, that covenant is reliable. God begins to fulfill that covenant by allowing Abraham to buy a piece of land in the promised land. The Lord blesses Abraham with a son. The Lord also blesses Abraham with great possessions. In every way, the Lord begins to keep the covenant that he made with Abraham.

### THE MODERN WORLD

Now the important question for us to consider is this: What does this mean to people today? When we highlight the message of the integrity and reliability of God, how is that important for the modern world? Do we still have situations where this question is a crucial one? I believe that we do. Many people in today's world are looking for something solid. People are looking for a foundation that they can rely upon. People need to realize that the God of the Bible is reliable and trustworthy, and they need to see examples of this taken from the Scriptures. There are too many false teachers around in today's world who are presenting messages from unreliable sources. Often people are encouraged to look within themselves for the answers to life problems. All too often, it was looking within themselves that caused their problems in the first place. People are encouraged to get in touch with their feelings and to trust those feelings. The problem with this approach is that feelings are simply not a reliable foundation. Feelings and emotions are too changeable to be the kind of solid rock that one can build upon.

There seems to be something deep inside of most people that yearns for security and safety. That basic need causes most of us to think about providing security for our family. Advertisers know that, and so they use that need for security and reliability to sell us everything from automobile tires to smoke alarms. The same thing is true when we think of financial security. As we begin to mature, most of us think about retirement and how we can afford it. We also want to be sure that our families will be well cared for if anything should happen to us. That is why we have made insurance the huge business that it is in this country. All these aspects of security and reliability are important in their place. We want to know that these products and services will be there when we need them and that they will do what they claim. We need to realize, however, that people have this same need for security and reliability in the spiritual realm.

This concern about spiritual matters takes many forms in today's world. Some people have turned to the so-called New Age movements for spiritual security. People are willing to believe the most outlandish claims you can imagine because it offers them some sense of security and reliability. For these same reasons, many people have accepted the word of popular media evangelists. These radio and television evangelists make wonderful promises of blessings and success for all those who accept their message. They call for little or no sacrifice on the part of their listeners except for the financial sacrifice needed to contribute to their programs. People are fooled into accepting these false claims because they are so desperately seeking something reliable and trustworthy in their lives.

Much that people have assumed to be reliable has been eroded away by our modern world. People see families crumbling under the pressure of divorce. Banks and financial institutions fail every day. Government officials in trusted positions lie and abuse their power. We see whole countries changing their governments and their boundaries. There is little wonder that people seek some reliable foundation on which to base their lives.

In a society such as ours, perhaps it is time once again to emphasize one of the most basic truths about the nature of the



God of the Scriptures. The God of the Bible is one who is reliable and trustworthy. The God revealed in the Old and New Testaments is a God of integrity. This may sound too basic to many who have studied the Scriptures for years, but it may be just this basic message that is needed by many people who are searching for some solid foundation in a shifting world.

The book of Genesis provides a wonderful opportunity to illustrate the reliability of God's Word in many different ways. The various stories appeal to the different interests of people and illustrate human beings in very real life situations. The challenge for us is to make these events come alive and help people see the wonderful principles that are illustrated there.

## HUMAN SEXUALITY

Joel Johnson

The story of creation is the proper place to begin a study of human sexuality. God created the heavens and the earth, all living things, and finally, "God created man in his own image." So there could be no misunderstanding about the quality of that creation the writer adds, "in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27).<sup>1</sup> "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

In spite of this clear message of beginnings, many today believe that human sexuality with its passions and desires is not to be a part of a truly holy life. It is as though the spiritual person is to be above such earthly or fleshly concerns and focused, rather, on other-worldly matters. Any attention given to sensual things is considered by many to be a compromise in holiness.

My lesson will examine biblical teachings regarding human sexuality. Specifically, the question to be addressed is, "What is the relationship between human passion and the call to holiness?"

Many Christians are unnecessarily burdened because they wrongly believe that to have strong passions and desires, especially of a sexual nature, is contrary to holiness. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7; KJV), and "Every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery" (Mt. 5:28), are cited in support of the notion that to think about a sinful act is equivalent to committing the act.

The Bible does not teach that desire is equal to sin, and the misunderstanding of this has brought havoc to many conscien-



tious Christians. Some have dropped out of the Christian race because they have felt overwhelming defeat by their inability to control their desire. Earnestly desiring to live righteously, they pledge to God a devotion to purity and yet repeatedly fail to live up to their standard. Over a period of time of repeated defeat, individuals may drop out of Christianity altogether, convinced there is some major moral flaw in their lives which stands as a barrier to their relationship with God. Down on self for a lack of faith and/or angry at God for giving them such a curse, they give up rather than continue the self-defeating cycle. "Wretched man that I am. . . ."

Others cope by living dual lives, vacillating between being spiritually focused and carnally controlled. After vowing to live a life free of sinful desire, any such worldly passion is pushed from the conscious mind and the individual feels a sense of spirituality void of any awareness of fleshly desire. Then, as though a dam had burst, the person engages in some impulsive sin which seems totally out of character for such a spiritual person. Such individuals often report a sensation of being out of control, as though the body was doing the deed but the personality was not involved.

A variation of this type of coping is the individual who believes that heterosexual desires are sinful and, therefore, should be avoided at all cost. Over a period of time, this mental suppression of the natural passion is replaced by an unnatural desire, opening the door for the development of homosexual desires. Or an individual may suppress natural desire to such a degree that he or she is unable to experience sexual desire within a marital relationship.

There is a third type of coping with this misunderstanding which is frequently employed. Believing that all passions and desires are sinful, the individual reassures self that these lapses in moral purity are part of his or her sinful nature. The person may find peace, however, believing that grace continually cleanses one from these sins. One continues to commit the mental sins and acknowledges them to be such, but freely relies upon grace to take away the guilt. Such a view minimizes the severity of sin, cheapens grace, and fails to comprehend the

meaning of a life lived under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

The very core of our being is our sexuality. If we do not properly understand how our sexual feelings, thoughts, and behaviors fit into God's design, then guilt, shame, and sin will reign where joy and thanksgiving were intended. There is no issue which has any greater practical relevance than this one.

What, then, is the proper relationship between one's sexual passions and holiness? To address this question, a detailed examination of biblical teachings on human passions, generally, and sexual desires, specifically, will be presented. As people who have been called to be holy (1 Pet. 1:15), this study is necessary in order to understand God's will and expectation for his human creatures and their passions.

First, it should be noted that "lust" *per se* is not a sin. The term which is usually translated "passion," "lust," "long for," "desire," "earnestly desire," or "covet" is *epithymia* (verb form, *epithymeō*). There are several passages in which *epithymia* is used in a positive sense. Jesus "lusted" to eat the Passover with his disciples (Lk. 22:15); prophets "lusted" to see and hear what was being revealed by Jesus (Mt. 13:17); those who aspire to be bishops "lust after" a good thing (1 Tim. 3:1); Paul "lusted" to depart this life in order to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23). For other positive or neutral usages of *epithymia*, see Lk. 15:16; 17:22; 1 Thess. 2:17; Heb. 6:11; and 1 Pet. 1:12.

These and other usages of "lust" make clear that *epithymia* is not necessarily sexual in content or morally wrong. There are, however, numerous incidences in the New Testament where *epithymia* is associated with sin. When and under what conditions is lust a sin? How can a Christian be holy and have sexual passions at the same time? To answer these vital questions, a survey will be made of several key passages which discuss lust, sin, and holiness. In each section heading, the verse or verses which specifically mention *epithymia* will be cited even though a larger context will be examined.

## ROMANS 1:24

In Romans 1, Paul points out that all people are under God's



wrath because they failed to live according to their knowledge of God. Even though God's nature was visible in creation, they did not honor God as Creator or follow their conscience and obey what they knew about God.

Since they did not follow God, he "gave them up in the *lusts* of their hearts to impurity" (Rom. 1:24; emphasis mine). What is the sin associated with lusts (*epithymia*) in this verse? It is *not* having the passions. We are created with desires, and that is good (Gen. 1:31). The sin is in *following* those desires rather than following the knowledge of God. For example, it is not wrong for a man to have a sexual desire for a woman; in fact, this is good. It is wrong for a man to carry out that desire in a sexual relationship outside of marriage.

Basically, Paul is saying there is one of two influences which can control a person's life. Either God or one's desires can be on the throne. Those who follow the bumper sticker philosophy, "If it feels good, do it," will be given over to their base minds and will become "filled with all manner of wickedness" (Rom. 1:29). It is not a sin to have strong desire. It is a sin to dethrone the will of God from our hearts and live according to our desires.

### ROMANS 6:12

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their *passions*" (Rom. 6:12; emphasis mine). Again, notice Paul does not say it is wrong to have the passion (*epithymia*). Sin reigns when one *obeys* the passion rather than God. The sin is in the following or obeying the desire, not in the desire per se.

In order to apply this to our lives, we need to remember that desire is a mental or cognitive event. I have heard people say, "It's okay to have sexual desires as long as one does not have illicit sexual thoughts or fantasies." While that may sound freeing and liberating, it is really an impossibility. What sexual thoughts can a single person have which, if acted upon, would not be illicit?

This and other verses in our survey make it clear that it is the

acting upon or obeying of desires which allows sin to reign.

### ROMANS 13:14

Beginning with Rom. 13:12, Paul contrasts living in darkness with being in the light. He admonishes Christians to *conduct* themselves "as in the day." In contrast to reveling, drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, quarreling, and jealousy, he says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *gratify* its desires" (Rom. 13:14; emphasis mine). Again, the desires are not wrong. Acting upon those desires which are against the lordship of Jesus Christ is wrong.

If one reads from the NIV a major problem is created by the bias of the translators. They *assume* that these desires and impulses are in and of themselves wrong. To reflect this bias in the translation, they consistently insert words and meanings which are not in the Greek text. For example, *sarx*, which is usually translated "flesh," is described as "sinful nature" (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16, 24; Eph. 2:3). *Epithymia* is rendered "sinful desires" (Rom. 1:24; 1 Pet. 2:11), "evil desires" (Rom. 6:12; Jas. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:14), and "evil human desires" (1 Pet. 4:2). The "lust of the flesh," as rendered by KJV and RSV in 1 Jn. 2:16, is translated as "cravings of sinful man" in the NIV.

This tampering of the text is far more than mere academic quibbling. The desires for eating, sleeping, and sexual contact, as well as other human appetites, are all good but all must be regulated. When the desire itself is condemned, the battlefield in the war for holiness is drawn at the wrong place and Satan gains a decided advantage.

### GALATIANS 5:16, 17, 24

In this section Paul admonishes Christians to walk by the Spirit and not to *gratify* the desires of the flesh. He does not say not to *have* the lusts of the flesh—that would be against God's created order. Rather, do not *act* on them. More specifically, do not bring them to completion or be conformed to them.

What does the statement "the desires of the Spirit are against



the flesh" (Gal. 5:17) mean? Some would argue that this means all desires or lusts are sinful. As noted above, this is the position reflected in the NIV. Obviously, all fleshly desires are not sinful. The desire to eat is a desire of the flesh as is the sexual desire. These are not wrong in and of themselves. They are wrong only when they "prevent you from doing what you would" (Gal. 5:17).

Those passions which prevent a person from walking by the Spirit or being led by the Spirit are to be crucified; that is, they are not to be acted upon (Gal. 5:24). The flesh of the Christian is not literally crucified, but the controlling passions are. Christians are to walk by the Spirit.

### EPHESIANS 2:3

Paul begins this chapter with the reminder that at one time we lived according to our lusts and were, therefore, dead through our trespasses and sins. As in previous passages, he does not condemn having passions, but rather "*following* the desires of body and mind" (Eph. 2:3; emphasis mine).

In contrast to following our passions, Paul urges Christians to *walk* in "good works" for which we were created (Eph. 2:10). This passage raises an interesting point regarding the role of sin as mental thought. If one sees someone hungry and imagines giving that person food but does not in fact give the person food, has an act of love been performed? Although *tempted* to do good, until the desire is put into *action*, it is only a desire. Likewise, for one to have a desire to do something wrong is a temptation. Temptation is not sinful. It is temptation. More on this later.

### EPHESIANS 4:22

In this section Paul contrasts the old nature with the new. He refers to a manner of life which was "corrupt through deceitful lusts." There is a contrast made between "deceptive" desires (Eph. 4:22) and "true" righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24). How easy it is to believe that if we can just get our wants

satisfied, then we will be happy. Paul says, "You did not learn that from Christ." Lusts can be deceitful, so put off the nature led by those illusionary desires and put on the new nature which is created in the likeness of God. In him and nowhere else does one find true holiness. Notice in Eph. 4:25—6:20 the manner of life characterized as "created in the likeness of God" (Eph. 4:24).

### TITUS 2:12

In this brief section, Paul summarizes the role of holiness and passions. The NIV puts it this way: "For the grace of God . . . teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions [*epithymia*]." That is very clear and very simple. God's grace does *not* appear so that we may not have passions but so that we may say "No" to those which, if followed, would lead us away from God and godliness. Therefore, we are to live self-controlled (saying "No" to desires), upright, and godly lives, eager to *do* what is good.

### 1 PETER 1:14

Peter repeats the same message presented by Paul. "As obedient children, do not be *conformed* to the passions of your former ignorance" (1 Pet. 1:14; emphasis mine). You once lived to satisfy your lusts but now "as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your *conduct*" (1 Pet. 1:15; emphasis mine). Again, does Peter say not to have lusts? No. Do not be conformed to them or shaped by them. Rather, be shaped in God's likeness.

### 1 PETER 2:11

Once again, and consistent with the other passages examined, we see that Peter does not call upon Christians to not have lusts. Rather, he beseeches them to "abstain" from them. Further, he refers to a war which is being waged in the soul. This is the war of lordship. Who or what is going to rule in a



person's life? Instead of following or partaking of desires which would be wrong, Peter says to "maintain good *conduct*" (1 Pet. 2:12; emphasis mine) so that unbelievers "may see your good *deeds* and glorify God" (1 Pet. 2:12; emphasis mine).

To have a fleshly desire which is never acted upon is not sinful just as it is not righteousness to think about something good but never do anything. Even in Paul's well-known admonition to think on what is true, honorable, worthy of praise, etc., he is aware that to think on such things without corresponding actions would be meaningless. So he quickly adds, "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, *do*; and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:8, 9; emphasis mine).

### 1 PETER 4:2, 3

In this section we see once again the contrast in the way of living between the Christian and the non-Christian. Peter says to "live" or conduct your lives according to the will of God and, now that you are followers of Christ, no longer according to human passions (*epithymia*).

Then for added emphasis he says, "Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, *living in* [or, conducting one's life according to] licentiousness, passions [*epithymia*], drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry" (1 Pet. 4:3; emphasis mine). Peter is in no way implying that Christians should not have passions. He is warning against living according to those passions instead of according to the will of God.

### JAMES 1:14, 15

This section offers a clear description of the relationship of lusts and holiness. James states that God does not tempt a person but one is tempted when he is "lured and enticed by his own desire [*epithymia*]." Is it sin to be tempted? Is it sin to have strong desire? No, it is temptation.

"*Then* desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin" (Jas.

1:15; emphasis mine). James uses a powerful and graphic metaphor. A woman conceives and, therefore, has a great potential for having a child. But conception is not birth. However, James warns that there is potential for sin in desires. If left unchecked, lust will give birth to sin.

"And sin when it is full-grown brings forth death." That is, if a person gives in to the temptation and sins, and then continues to live in that sin, the end is death.

The conclusion of all these passages is consistent and convincing. Human desires are created by God for our good as a part of his good creation. Like any good thing, they are subject to abuse and distortion and if left unchecked by God's will and an obedient spirit, they have the potential of leading one away from God. But it is not the desires that are wrong; it is saying "yes" to them. The thing which makes any desire either good or bad, right or wrong, is the action which proceeds from it.

### MATTHEW 5:28

Does Jesus not teach that one sins when he looks with desire, even though an action never follows? Is not the look and corresponding desire sinful? "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully [i.e., with desire] has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt. 5:28). This passage is often taken to mean that any look which results in sexual desire is sin. But Jesus is not condemning normal sexual desire that results from visual contact. He is condemning the intent of the heart which *purposes* to possess another sexually.

There are six ways that purpose may be expressed in New Testament Greek usage, one of which is used by Jesus in this passage. "Everyone that looks on a woman for the purpose of lust" is a translation which more accurately reflects the sentiment of the text.<sup>2</sup> Since purpose means that the heart has already committed to the desire, Lenski points out that the sin of adultery in the heart is committed before the lustful look.

Jesus does not say that by the accomplished lusting or by and during the act of looking at the woman the man in



question commits adultery. . . . The man who casts lustful looks is an adulterer to begin with. The sin is already "in his heart" and only comes out in his lustful look. If the heart were pure, without adultery, no lustful look would be possible.<sup>3</sup>

This text becomes clearer when we realize that the modern distinction between the "mind" as seat of thinking and the "heart" as seat of feeling is alien from the meaning these terms carry in the Bible. In both the Old and New Testaments the heart is the seat of reason and will.<sup>4</sup> It is that part of man out of which judgments are made (Jas. 2:4) and conduct follows. "The heart is above all the central place in man to which God turns, where religious experience has its root, which determines conduct."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus is not condemning looking and having a sexual *feeling*. Jesus is simply confronting the self-righteous Pharisees with the sinful *intents* of their will. He tells them that they are already committed to the act of adultery and their lustful looks reflect the purpose of their hearts, even though the actual deed has not taken place.

### CASE STUDY

To help translate this understanding of lust and sin, let us return to the Garden of Eden and follow Eve as she struggles with that original temptation.

God says to Eve, "Whatever you desire [*epithymia*] to eat you may have except the fruit of that tree over there." Eve understands and accepts the limitation.

Weeks later, after Eve had eaten of all the other fruit in the garden, she comes upon the forbidden tree and looks at it. She thinks it looks good and wonders how it might taste. She remembers God's command and, wanting to be pleasing to God, says "no" and walks away.

Has Eve sinned yet? Is it an "evil" passion and a part of her "sinful nature" for her to have a desire for the tree? Did she have a desire for the fruit *before* she sinned? When did Eve sin?

A few nights later, Eve is having difficulty sleeping and her

mind drifts to imaginations about the tree. She imagines going to the tree, plucking the fruit and taking a bite. Her mouth waters at the thought. She continues with her fantasy and imagines God's angry reaction, remembering with shocking realism his warning and the consequence of disobedience. She breathes a sigh of relief that she had not disobeyed earlier when tempted, then goes to sleep. Has she sinned yet?

A few days later, Eve is standing by the tree, looking, longing, tasting in her mind the sweetness of the fruit, finding hope in Satan's explanation that God was not really serious about his prohibition. After all, she reasons, God did want her to be happy and fulfilled and the fruit of the forbidden tree would certainly make her whole. She debates inwardly her next move. Has she sinned?

James would say she is being lured and enticed by her desire. We might add that she is in the final stage of labor but has not yet given birth to sin in that she still says "no" to the temptation.

Later that day, she passes by the tree and stops. After some inward debate, she decides "yes" and reaches for the tree. Before she can actually touch the fruit, Adam sees her moving toward it, grabs her, and restrains her from her intended action. Has she sinned?

According to Jesus in Mt. 5:28 she has sinned. Even though she has not committed the *act*, she had already said "yes" to the desire. That is, she decided in that part of her being which controls the will and conduct, the heart, that she would follow her desire rather than the will of God. Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees was that they had already said "yes" to their adulterous desires. They were constrained from acting on them, not because they had the will of God at heart, but because of some other base desire. It is like the person who says, "I would kill you except I don't want to spend the rest of my life in jail." That person does not have God's desire controlling his life but his own desire. He is already a murderer.

What basic conclusion can be reached from this study? God created mankind with sexual passions and desires, and "behold it was very good" (Gen. 1:27, 32). A life lived in conformity to



the will of God can possess these gifts with thanksgiving. A life lived in unrestrained indulgence will lead to destruction.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>All Scripture references are from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 207; Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 193-94.

<sup>3</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), 226.

<sup>4</sup>E. C. Blackman, "Mind, Heart," in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson (New York: Macmillan Co., 1950), 145.

<sup>5</sup>Friedrich Hauck, "karpos," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 3:615.

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## THE FAMILY IN GENESIS: A DIVINE INSTITUTION

Allan L. Isom

### GENESIS AND MARRIAGE

Adam was lonely in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:18). So God caused a deep sleep to fall upon him and with a rib taken from the man's side God made a wife. She was to be Adam's "help-mate" (KJV).

"Helpmate" means one "suitable" for another. The NIV translates this phrase to be "helper suitable for him." Eve was suitable for Adam. Yet the opposite is also true: Adam was suitable for Eve. The idea is that the two of them fit together and they fit each other. The term "helper" has in mind that Eve would be helpful to Adam. The opposite is also implied: Adam would be helpful to Eve.

#### *God's Purpose for the Home*

Why did God establish the home? What purposes did he have in mind? Below are some of the more apparent ones:

1. One purpose for the home was that of *social relationships*. Adam's loneliness was addressed in the creation of Eve. A husband and wife are to leave father and mother, cleave to each other, and become one flesh (Gen. 2:24).

One's primary social partner is to be one's mate. Everyone else is to be socially secondary. This begins with a husband and a wife and includes friends as well. So when marriage takes place the two people are to develop a strong social bond which excludes others at the top level of social relationships.

Eve was to be the one who would primarily satisfy Adam's loneliness. And Adam was to be the one who primarily would meet Eve's social needs. With this goal in mind they were to be



bonded (to cleave) together (Gen. 2:24).

Couples make a serious mistake when after the honeymoon is over a mate begins to spend significant time with friends and leaves the mate at home. This tempts a mate to feel jealous and perhaps inferior. Others are taking their place.

God wants a husband and a wife not only to love one another but to be social buddies. Time can still be spent with individuals other than a mate. In fact, it is important for a mate to spend some time with others away from a mate or in things without involvement of a mate. This helps one to develop individuality which is a point of maturity.

2. A second purpose found in the home as God purposed it is that in marriage man's *biological needs* were to be met. Humans are sexual beings. God made them that way. Eve was named "Eve" because she was taken from Adam (Gen. 2:23). Being taken from Adam means they complimented each other but they were different. Heterosexuality is seen in the creation of Adam and Eve.

Together they made a pair. Their sexual relationship was a natural result of who and what they were. God never designed homosexuality. It is foreign to the creation act of God in making Adam and Eve. In fact, homosexuality is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:27).

Sexual relations with one other than one's own married partner is a sin (Deut. 5:18; Heb. 13:4). God designed for a husband and a wife to have sex with each other and no one else. There is nothing tainted about such a relationship. It is right and good because God designed it for the marital union. A husband and a wife should seek to recover the type of physical encounter enjoyed by Adam and Eve.

Some young people have stated that after being told all of their lives that sex is wrong they initially had difficulty in marriage thinking that it is okay. Rather than saying sex is wrong, Bible teachers would be wise to say that sex out of the marital bond is wrong.

3. A third purpose God had for the marital unit is that of *procreation or propagation*. Only in the marital unit are children to be born. To have a child out of wedlock involves not

only adultery but sinning against God's purpose for the home. God wants each baby to be reared by a father and a mother who live together in holy wedlock.

Adam knew Eve and Cain was born (Gen. 4:1). The Hebrew term for "know" is *yada*. It means to get to know another. In this case, it involved a sexual relationship. These are the basic purposes for which God created the home.

#### *Does God Allow Planned Parenthood?*

An important question to ask is, Was sex for the exclusive purpose of having children? The answer to this question is no. While God gave the general directive for parents to have children, the Bible never equates all sexual acts with the desire for pregnancy (Gen. 1:28).

In fact, on one occasion Jesus said, "Woe to those who are pregnant and those with nursing babies in those days" (Mk. 13:17). The days he was speaking of refer to the abomination of desolation. A simple definition of the word "woe" is, "with the doing or being one faces a curse." A tragic conclusion is promised. An example would be, "woe be the one who jumps off the Empire State Building."

The tragedy is not over the sex act but if one is pregnant when the abomination of desolation takes place. Therefore, one is to avoid pregnancy during such times, not necessarily sexual encounters with a mate.

Another argument against equating marital duty with attempted conception is health reasons. There have been cases where a medical doctor advised a woman to cease having children, either for the sake of the newborn or the health of the mother. In such cases a couple could take the advice of a trained physician, use preventive conception measures but continue marital or conjugal relations.

#### *Leave, Cleave, and Become One Flesh: The Purpose*

The Bible does not have a marriage ceremony which believers are to follow. In fact, the words often used in marriage ceremonies come from Ruth's pledge to Naomi, her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:16, 17). However, there are some guidelines in the Bible to be used in the establishment of a marriage. These three



words can be called the process of matrimony (Gen. 2:24). There are three obvious ones.

1. The first of these is that there is to be a "leaving" take place. The mate is to leave both father and mother. Leaving may not refer to geographical areas. These early family units stayed together and formed tribes led by men called "patriarchs" (Heb. 7:4). Wives joined the husband's tribe.

Therefore, leaving involved social obligations. The husband socially was to leave his parents and cleave to his wife, and together they were to be one autonomous social unit. Indirectly, this verse also applies to the parents of the young married couple. They were to encourage the emergence of this new home rather than encourage dependency. They should do whatever they could to facilitate this autonomy.

Autonomy means the right to govern themselves, to exist independently of another home. In order to be self-governing, two conditions must exist. (1) The couple must be able to determine their own rules, regulations, or traditions. In-laws must not coerce or interfere but encourage the new home to develop its own identity. (2) The couple must financially be able to sustain themselves. Money is power, and so monies given to the new home must not have any strings attached which would undercut the couple's ability to be independent. When parents "give" their offspring to matrimony, they should make sure this giving also includes a commitment to the autonomy of this new family unit.

What is involved in the "leaving"? God has left that part of the process up to culture. Whatever the culture does is approved of God, providing it does not violate biblical moral or ethical values. Therefore, there is no one way to work out the marital process. Customs about courtship and the marriage ceremony may vary from culture to culture.

In ancient cultures, the "leaving" part of the marriage process was in the hands of the parents. The parents of young people would use a neutral party to work out marital agreements. Something of value was usually passed to the parents of the daughter. An agreement about marriage would be reached relative to a particular boy and girl as well as the wedding date.

Western culture has given rise to another way to work out the "leaving" principle. The method of dating to find a person to marry is not an old method. Interested persons are to get into a "dating pool" and establish courting relationships. From this trial-and-error method two people come together for the purpose of engaging in marriage.

Parents may seek to oversee the selection process but many have little input in the final selection. If an offspring lives away from home, the parents may first meet the prospective mate after the decision to marry has been made. So they are expected to give approval based on very little information. If this occurs, it probably means something is amiss between the young person and his or her parents. In healthy families, children and parents encourage acceptance of one another as well as friendships. Therefore, parents are brought into the scene during the courtship period so they can have their input in the selection process. It is best if the premarital couple will want to have a dynamic relationship with both sets of parents before and after the marriage takes place.

Marriage does not involve just two people. "Leaving" does not mean the couple cuts all ties with their parents. When mature people marry, they do not abandon their parents. A more realistic thought is that mates actually are brought into an already existing family network.

2. The second important part of the marriage process is that of "cleaving." This word means to "bind together." After the selection process (leaving) has occurred, the couple looks forward to the time when they can tie the knot. Cleaving has to do with when the culture approves the couple to live as married people.

In America the laws of the land help determine this point. Because of the rights of the husband and the wife, certain laws have been passed. These laws seek to protect those rights. The marriage ceremony is considered the time when individuals assume responsibility for the union.

Laws differ from state to state, but each state recognizes the point in time when the couple is married. From that time on some action of the court is necessary to dissolve the union. It is



also interesting to note that the government recognizes some input from the religious affiliation the couple espouses.

For example, the government allows religious groups to determine who will be able to officiate marriage ceremonies for them. The government also recognizes the type of marriage ceremony sanctioned by religious groups. A civil ceremony, where a government official marries the couple, is also acceptable. Basically, the point in time when the couple is considered married occurs when they are pronounced "husband and wife." It is rather humorous that some ministers pronounce them "man and wife." Probably the husband knows he is a man and does not need the minister's public pronouncement.

One ceremony in Africa involved a stick. Two people hold the stick low to the ground and the couple jumps over it. When their feet touch the ground on the other side, they are considered married. One would hope a jilted lover did not get his hands on the stick. A couple might then have to use a pole to vault over that stick.

God has depended on culture to come up with appropriate ways for the couple to tie the knot. However, Christians see God as the decisive agent joining the couple together. Therefore, all aspects of the marriage ceremony must reflect the fact that God is involved. If God cannot fit into the plans of the marriage ceremony, then the plans need to be changed.

3. The third guideline found in God's design for marriage is "one flesh." Surely sexual relations are involved in these words. However, much more than that is involved. Oneness has to do with goals, directions, principles, values, and beliefs as well as sexual relations.

Paul speaks of the union of Jesus and the church as reflecting the union of husband and wife. Just as Christ cares for the church in a spiritual oneness, so the husband and wife are to care for each other which is descriptive of one flesh (Eph. 5:25-31).

The Bible has many passages which speak of the marital union and they include more than the sexual relationship. (See Tit. 2:4; 1 Pet. 3:1-7; Eph. 5:33; 1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Cor. 7:14; Prov. 18:22; Eccles. 9:9.)

"One flesh" does involve sexual relations. Paul gives some pertinent instructions to marital partners about this point. The husband's body does not belong to him, but rather it belongs to the wife. Likewise, the wife's body does not belong to her, but it belongs to her husband. Each is told to give to the other their marital rights (1 Cor. 7:2-5).

The phrase "marital right" means favor, affection, and benevolence. A mate is to participate in a reciprocal relationship of affection. Paul qualified this directive for those who were involved in a season of prayer. Few mates could claim this exemption today based on extensive prayer. The meaning of Paul's instruction is that each mate is to seek to sexually bless their mate.

#### *Does God Plan for Everyone to Marry?*

Another question which needs to be addressed is, "Does God want everyone to marry?" When God observed Adam's loneliness, he made Eve. And the text says, "It is not good that man should be alone; therefore I will make a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:18).

The word "Adam" is used as a proper name and a noun. In other words, it can mean the man Adam or man. One could say, "I saw Adam, an adam, cross the street." That would be interpreted to mean a man "adam" named "Adam" crossed the street. One has to look in the context to determine how the word "adam" is used.

In this passage, it seems best to use the term "adam" as a proper name. So God is saying that Adam was lonely and in need of a wife. This does not mean that God wants all men and women to marry and if they do not then they do not respect his wishes.

It was good for Adam to marry. He was lonely and wanted a mate. When he met Eve, he was happy. Some mistakenly say that man is incomplete unless he marries, that is, that the woman helps complete the man and makes him whole.

Jesus was not married. Yet he was complete and whole. Paul was not married and said the single person is more valuable as a worker in the church (1 Cor. 7:1, 2). The single will have less



distractions (mate and children) and more time to work in the church. Jeremiah was told by the Lord that he was not to marry (Jer. 16:1).

Therefore, for some people it is good to be single. And they do not disobey God if they choose to be single. To marry is a choice. And everyone should wisely consider the question and exercise their preferred choice.

### BIBLICAL BASIS OF MARRIAGE

God designed that the marriage of Adam and Eve would be based on a dynamic relationship. "Dynamic" means "power or energy." It may be actual or potential, but nevertheless it contains an energy supply. A marital relationship contains the potential to build or destroy. Wives and husbands will determine what will happen.

The dynamic involved in the marriage of Adam and Eve was based on such things as (1) their sexuality (male and female), (2) their suitability (Gen. 2:18), (3) their ability to love (cleave—which can be used to indicate affection (Gen. 34:3), and (4) their potential to be one (Gen. 2:24). This dynamic relationship can be blessed or diseased.

God put this relationship potential into the hands of Adam and Eve and told them "to be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). This lesson is devoted to exploring the type of relationship God wants in a Christian marriage.

#### *The Theology of the First Marriage*

The biblical basis for marriage is found in the way the Old and New Testaments treat the home. The most important Old Testament passage on the home is found in *Gen. 2:18-25*. In this text, Adam gives a name to every living creature. While this may have been an enjoyable experience, Adam did not find in any of them an adequate companion. So God put Adam to sleep, took a rib, made Eve, and brought her to Adam. When Adam was awakened and saw Eve, he exclaimed, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23).

The words "This at last" show some emotion in Adam. He had been lonely and now upon seeing Eve, Adam was deeply

moved. One must remember that sin did not occur until later. Their relationship was pure and right because God made them and brought them together.

Gen. 1:23 states, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." This verse suggests (1) *complementarity* existed between Adam and Eve—complementary in that they helped each other participate in a relationship which was impossible to have without the other.<sup>1</sup>

When any two colors are combined and the result is white, these two colors are said to be complementary to each other. If a disk of half blue and half yellow is rotated rapidly, the result is it looks white. So Adam and Eve were complementary to each other in that together they became something they could not be without the other. Yet just as half yellow or half blue is self-existing without each other, so Adam and Eve were created self-existing without each other but together they could expand their potential.

They were compensatory to each other which means each one could satisfy something in the other which could be satisfied in no other way. When this idea is taken to mean that all men are incomplete and thus defective unless married, it is stretched too far. The emphasis is not on incompleteness but a compensatory relationship.

(2) *Bonding* is suggested in the chapter when it states in Gen. 2:24b, "... be united to his wife. ..." Without bonding there cannot be unity, only clinging to a fragile relationship. This bonding should go beyond a marriage certificate or a social custom called a marriage ceremony. In fact in Mt. 19:6 Jesus said, "... what God has joined together, let not man separate." Jesus even lifts marriage or bonding above personal intentions: "let not man separate." It is clear that God's intention was for husband and wife to put together a marriage which could only be broken by God.

(3) The third key word in the creation account of Adam and Eve is *unity*. Gen. 2:24c says, "... and they will become one flesh." The possibility of unity is based on leaving parents and being bonded to a mate. Without these things taking place, it is



biblically impossible for a couple to have the type of marriage God designed. In order to have the unity God wants in a marriage, the couple need not simply see themselves as two individuals who have entered into a marriage contract. Rather they should participate in a marital relationship characterized by being totally available and responsive to each other. By mutually giving themselves to each other, two people who are different (male and female) will be able to build a relationship of unity or oneness.

However, unity cannot exist where equality of persons does not exist. The New American Bible translates Gen. 1:17, 18, "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them." This verse is saying both Eve and Adam equally have the image of God in them. Also in Gen. 5:2 the Bible states that God called Adam and Eve *man* (adam) implying equality. Thomas Martin makes the point that since the author shifts from the singular masculine pronoun in the second line to the plural in the third line, the intent is to show that the species is one. There is no attempt to make Adam and Eve's relationship into an hierarchy.<sup>2</sup>

These three words—"complementarity," "bonding," and "unity"—contain the basic theology about the marital relationship in the creation of Adam and Eve. God's design for marriage is clearly outlined in these three words. Husband and wife are to be complementary to each other, they are to be bonded together in an affectionate relationship so that divorce is not an alternative, and their unity is to transcend personalities and preferences as they become one flesh.

The marriage between Hosea and Gomer demonstrates the relationship intended in marriage. Hosea's marital relationship with Gomer was a replica of the relationship between God and his bride Israel. Before marriage, Gomer had a tendency towards being fickle. After marriage to Hosea, Gomer went after other lovers. Hosea was the father of the first child, but the text leaves one questioning whether or not he was the father of the other two children (Hosea 1).

After her lovers proved to be false, Gomer was left in a hopeless condition. Hosea bought her for the equivalent price

of thirty pieces of silver, the price for a wounded slave (Ex. 21:32). This was considered to be the least price that could be paid for a Hebrew slave. Gomer was destitute, but Hosea came to her rescue. Hosea bought her not because she was worthy, but because he had steadfast love (*hesed*) for Gomer. To Hosea they had more than a marriage contract; they had a relationship which Hosea chose to energize.

God and Israel had a relationship. Even though Israel was unfaithful, God would not be unfaithful to his bride Israel. Hosea announces to Israel that God would betroth her to himself in righteousness, justice, steadfast love, compassion, and faithfulness (Hos. 2:19, 20). The Hebrew term "betroth" means the "price to be paid." So Hosea is saying God wants a relationship with Israel based upon the five previously mentioned words. The result would be God would bless Israel and Israel would respond by pledging, "You are my God" (Hos. 2:23d). This is the type of relationship wanted in Adam and Eve's marriage, namely, one which would honor God and be a blessing to each other.

This initial relationship between Adam and Eve is one which is the model for Christian marriages to follow. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve lived in a perfect environment and had a perfect relationship. They were suitable for each other and lived in trust, love, and security. There was nothing tainted in their relationship. It is noteworthy to remember that the first sin did not involve a problem between Adam and Eve. Rather it was between mankind and God. Satan used the occasion to tempt them to sin against God. Later they sinned against each other. And after they were removed from the garden, then they began to see problems developing within the human race.

#### *Contract, Covenant, or Relationship*

At times some leaders in Christendom see marriage as a contract. They may define "marriage" as "the conjugal union of man and woman in which duties and rights of each party are written out in a definite contract." Contracts specify certain "rights" a person has. This type of thinking often leads mates to emphasize duties and debts owed. In other words, a husband



has a right to his wife's body since that is written in the contract, and she is not to object since this is her duty. Such thinking depersonalizes the human spirit.

The covenant idea *focuses* on the promises one makes in a marriage rather than on what the other promises. The covenant between God and Israel serves as an example. God promised some things to Israel, and Israel promised to do some things to God. Faithfulness to these promises is most important. Without carrying out these promises, a person is guilty of wrong, and the marriage will fail. The terms of the covenant come from Scripture. So mates pledge from Scripture certain promises and with God's help try to carry them out. Anderson and Guernsey develop this theme in their book *On Being Family*.<sup>3</sup>

However, it seems that a marital relationship takes into consideration both contract and covenant but allows one to view marriage from a broader perspective. God designed Adam and Eve for each other and told them to be fruitful and multiply and take care of the Garden of Eden. Certainly, contractual agreement is involved since they did have the right to live in the garden as well as the duty to take care of it. Covenant is seen in it in that they promised to take care of the garden.

But relationship involves more than promises and duties. It requires one to think in terms of quality and not just quantity. One can fulfill a duty in terms of quantity but not give quality. Eve was made suitable for Adam. However, this does not mean she was responsible for Adam's feelings, that is, if Adam felt lonely it was her fault. She existed for the God-intended purpose of her creation, and that was to be a suitable mate for Adam. And Adam was to be a suitable mate for Eve.

Thus they were to put together a quality relationship, one that was pleasing to each other but also to God. As she pleased God in being Adam's wife, she would be pleasing to Adam's real need. Therefore, God's intention in creating marriage was and is for husband and wife to put together a quality relationship which is well pleasing to God. And after God had created Adam and Eve and saw their marital relationship, he said of his

creation, "It was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Moses supports this point in that since divorce was occurring, his law gave instructions about managing a broken (divorce) relationship. Certain things had to be done, one of which was that a bill of divorce was to be given to the wife. Also, if remarriage to another takes place, the first marrieds could never renew their relationship (Deut. 24:1-4). Jesus defended the relationship idea before the Pharisees. They wanted to think about grounds for divorce, and Jesus called their attention to the relationship factor by saying, "What God has joined [glued] together let not man separate [divorce]" (Mt. 19:6).

The apostle Paul points out that a religiously divided marriage is not grounds for divorce. The Christian mate is to keep trying to make it a good marriage, a quality relationship (1 Cor. 7:12-15). Peter addressed the same idea when he told a wife married to an unbeliever who cannot be won by the spoken word to win him with "a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Pet. 3:4).

When all Bible passages about marriage are studied, one realizes God wants married people to be creative in developing a marital relationship using such things as love, forgiveness, kindness, patience, peace, and good communication. By so doing, married couples develop a Christian home which blesses themselves and their children and is an evangelistic tool to reach others.

Having done marriage counseling for over thirty years, I have found this approach to be most helpful to those who want to improve their marriage. Below is listed several reasons why focusing on relationship building is helpful to couples.

1. It helps them develop team (marital) goals rather than personal or selfish goals.
2. It promotes collective thinking (as demonstrated by the use of "we" pronouns) rather than "you and me" factions (as demonstrated when mates develop a list of things "you," their mate, should do).
3. It promotes a creative atmosphere that things can change, since both have the same purpose.



4. It encourages mates to learn how to participate and work together in their marriage.
5. It promotes dialogue in communication rather than monologue which defends self and attacks a mate.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Martin, *The Challenge of Christian Marriage* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>R. Anderson and D. Guernsey, *On Being Family* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985).

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## PAUL'S USE OF GENESIS AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Allen Black

The last two decades have brought far-reaching changes for women in American society. More and more Americans see no rationale for any subordinate role for women in society, the home, or the church. Churches of Christ are beginning to face tremendous social pressures to re-evaluate their positions on the roles of women.

In this lesson I hope to make a small contribution to this vital area of concern. I take up this subject hesitatingly and prayerfully, realizing both its grave importance for all men and women and the fact that most interpretations are partially influenced by the experiences of the interpreter.

My intentions are limited. I seek only to interpret the way Paul applies Genesis 1—3 to the role of women. The key texts in this respect are 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1 Cor. 14:33b-36; and 1 Tim. 2:8-15. (Many other texts would have to be considered to understand Paul's views of women in a more comprehensive way.) Concerning these three texts, I plan to focus only on how Paul relates Genesis to what he says concerning women's subordinate role and not on many other fascinating and important areas of concern about veils, women teaching, etc.

Furthermore, most of my remarks will be based on my own reading of the texts and an investigation of several recent evangelical works. Evangelical scholars have been working hard on re-evaluating the Scriptures concerning women's roles for twenty years and have produced many books and articles which can be a major help to us in our efforts. Particularly important are the exchanges between two evangelical societies formed in 1987: Christians for Biblical Equality (advocates of



"evangelical feminism") and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (advocates of a more traditional position they prefer to call "complementarian"). Both of these groups have published position papers in *Christianity Today* and have produced other written materials to explicate their positions.<sup>1</sup>

Both groups are pleased with some of the changes that have occurred in our society. Women have been and still are often treated unfairly, and the women's movement has made major strides in righting some genuine wrongs that women endure (for example, by advocating equal pay for equal work). However, the two evangelical groups are diametrically opposed on the issue of God's will concerning whether women should take a subordinate role in the home and the church.

The primary point at issue in the church is not the specific problems of how a subordinate role for women should be worked out (for example, whether women should wear veils, teach mixed adult classes, or preach). These issues are obviously important, but the fundamental problem is whether women should have *any* subordinate role *at all* in the home or church. The solutions to the specific practical problems are dependent upon the answer to this basic question. It is on this score that Paul's use of Genesis is crucial.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

In this passage Paul argues that women should wear and men should not wear a veil when they pray and prophesy.<sup>2</sup> A major part of Paul's rationale for his instructions to the Corinthian women is that "the head of woman is man" (1 Cor. 11:3) and "every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head" (1 Cor. 11:5).<sup>3</sup>

Since the publication of an influential article by Stephen Bedale in 1954, it has become increasingly popular to argue that the word translated "head" in verse 3 actually means "source" or "origin."<sup>4</sup> This argument eliminates the notion of a hierarchy of authority which has traditionally been understood as part of the concept of headship. However, although the argumentation is detailed and complicated, in my opinion

Wayne Grudem and Joseph Fitzmyer have successfully defended the traditional rendering "head."<sup>5</sup> The traditional opinion seems to be correct: Paul believes that man is the head of woman in the sense of having authority over her.

In verses 7 through 9, he grounds this notion of headship in the creation story of Genesis 2. Verse 7, of course, alludes to Gen. 1:26, where God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." The reference to glory in 1 Cor. 11:7 ("man . . . is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man") may be suggested by the fact that the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) sometimes translates the word here translated "likeness" as "glory"—although it does not do so in this case.<sup>6</sup> It is uncertain exactly what Paul means by glory, but he probably refers to that which brings honor and praise as opposed to shame.<sup>7</sup> (Note the contrast between "dishonor" and "glory" in verses 14 and 15 and the verb "shame" or "dishonor" in verses 4 and 5.) Paul does not say woman is the "image" of man because he knows Gen. 1:27 says God created "male and female" in God's image.

Although verse 7 alludes to Gen. 1:26, Paul did not derive the idea of woman being man's glory from Genesis 1. He goes on to explain his source for this conviction in 1 Cor. 11:8, 9: "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." There are two related ideas here. The first is based on the creation of Eve from Adam's rib in Gen. 2:21-23. Paul suggests that one ought to honor and recognize headship in the source of their existence.<sup>8</sup> The second is based on the account of God creating woman as a helper for man in Gen. 2:18-23 (although not based specifically on the word "helper" itself).<sup>9</sup> Paul understands the story to imply that woman was created because of man. Therefore, she should honor and recognize headship in the man.

Knowing that men tend to abuse their headship, Paul goes on to qualify these observations from verses 8 and 9 in verses 11 and 12.<sup>10</sup> There he notes that men and women are mutually interdependent, supporting his point by observing that just as woman was once created from man, so man is now born of



woman. Both of them ultimately come from God, to whom they owe honor and glory. They should recognize their mutual interdependence on each other and their total dependence upon God.

It is possible that the enigmatic "because of the angels" in verse 10 also refers to the creation accounts, albeit indirectly. One prominent theory concerning this phrase is that Paul refers to the angels because they are guardians of the created order. There is some evidence for this idea in the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>11</sup>

One question that must be raised in connection with 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is whether Paul speaks of man being the head of woman or more narrowly of the husband being the head of the wife.<sup>12</sup> The problem is created by the fact that in Greek there is one word that means both man and husband and another that means both woman and wife.<sup>13</sup> We can only determine the best translations by the context. It seems to me that the NRSV errs in trying to suggest that at least to some extent Paul is speaking more narrowly of the husband/wife relationship. Even in verse 3 the NRSV is forced into immediate inconsistency ("Christ is the head of every *man*, and the *husband* is the head of his wife").<sup>14</sup> It would certainly be impossible to maintain the renderings "husband" and "wife" in verse 12: "for just as the wife is [created] from the husband, so also the husband is [born] from the wife."<sup>15</sup>

For my purposes, the essential points to understand from 1 Cor. 11:2-16 are that Paul believes that man should be in a position of headship over woman, that he bases this conviction on the implications of the story of Eve's creation (Gen. 2:18-23), and that he seeks to curtail the abuses men make of their headship.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 14:33b-36

Probably verse 33b, "As in all the churches of the saints," and verse 36 belong with verses 34 and 35 as a paragraph. Because verses 34 and 35 appear in a few manuscripts at the end of 1 Corinthians 14, rather than after verse 33, and because

they appear to some to conflict with 1 Cor. 11:5, some modern scholars dismiss them as a later addition to Paul's text.<sup>16</sup> However, the authenticity of these verses is indicated by the fact that no manuscripts omit them.<sup>17</sup>

Some have supposed that in verses 34 and 35 Paul is quoting false teachers at Corinth, whom he reprimands in verse 36.<sup>18</sup> Besides a number of technical difficulties, it is difficult to harmonize this interpretation with 1 Tim. 2:11-15.<sup>19</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul focuses on what goes on in the assemblies at Corinth, especially in regard to tongue speaking and prophesying. When he writes concerning women in verses 33b through 36, it is hardly likely that he means that they must be totally silent. A few years ago a small splinter church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, refused to let women sing because of these verses, but everyone else I am aware of recognizes that the silence Paul commands must be circumscribed by the context. They probably refer to women participating in the judging of the prophets (see vv. 29-33)—an activity that clearly puts them in a role of authority over men.<sup>20</sup>

The only comment here that may refer us to Genesis is the statement in verse 34 that the law says women should be subordinate. Paul does not quote the text (or texts) he has in mind. Some have said he refers to the curse on woman in Gen. 3:16. But why select Gen. 3:16 when Paul does not refer to that verse elsewhere and when in 1 Corinthians itself and in 1 Tim. 2:13 he clearly refers to Gen. 2:18-23 to support his concept of subordination? This is probably another reference to Genesis 2.

Once again the question arises whether Paul has in mind the subordination of women to men or more narrowly wives to husbands. In this instance a fairly reasonable case can be made for the more narrow understanding, based on the exhortation in verse 34 for women to ask their men (husbands) at home.<sup>21</sup> Even so, most interpreters see a broader reference to women in general.<sup>22</sup> In 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15, Paul expresses his opinion that women are to be subordinate to men. He believes the implications of Genesis 2 apply beyond the husband/wife relationship to the relationship of men and



women in general in the church. The comment about asking men at home in verse 35 is then explained as based on the near universality of marriage for women or interpreted more broadly than "husband": "their men" might include fathers, slave masters, etc.

### 1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15

In 1 Tim. 2:8-15, Paul again addresses the behavior of both men and women, although the majority of his comments concern women. Verses 11 through 15 are particularly pertinent to his use of Genesis in connection with the role of women.

In verses 11 and 12, he returns to the concepts of 1 Cor. 14:34, 35: submission and silence. In verse 12 submission and silence are defined as not teaching or having authority over a man. Like the word for "head" in 1 Cor. 11:3, the word for "having authority over" in 1 Tim. 2:12 has been the subject of much discussion.<sup>23</sup> In my opinion, Knight and Wilshire have shown that it probably means "to have authority over."<sup>24</sup> It is questionable whether it had the negative connotations of "usurp authority" or "domineer."<sup>25</sup>

In order to support his position, Paul again turns to Genesis. The "for" at the beginning of verse 13 might mean simply that verses 13 and 14 are explanatory, basically illustrative observations.<sup>26</sup> It is more likely that it means "because."<sup>27</sup> These verses then introduce two rationales for Paul's instructions in verses 11 and 12.

In verse 13 he argues that woman's subordinate role is based on the fact that man was created first. This argument may reflect the privileged position of the first-born, a prominent idea in many Old Testament texts.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, it may be a shorthand reference to ideas similar to those expressed in 1 Cor. 11:8, 9: Woman was created from man and for man.

Verse 14 seems to me the most difficult of Paul's references to Genesis concerning women's role. Traditionally, it has been understood to mean that women in general are, like Eve, more easily deceived, and therefore they should not teach or have authority over men.<sup>29</sup> This understanding may then be tied in

to Paul's remarks about women at Ephesus who "have already turned aside to follow Satan" (1 Tim. 5:15) and to false teachers who "captivate silly women, overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires, who are always being instructed and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:6, 7). Although this interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:14 may be correct, there are some other factors that need to be taken into consideration.<sup>30</sup> It is, of course, not only women who are taken in by the false teachers at Ephesus. Most of the statements about people succumbing to false teaching are generic statements about men and women, and all of those who are specifically named in association with the false teaching are men. Furthermore, it would seem that if Paul thought women were generally easily deceived he would not instruct them to teach other women (Tit. 2:3-5).

Douglas Moo provides another possible interpretation:

More likely, then, verse 14, in conjunction with verse 13, is intended to remind the women at Ephesus that Eve was deceived by the serpent in the Garden (Gen. 3:13) precisely in taking the initiative over the man whom God had given to be with her and to care for her. In the same way, if the women at the church at Ephesus proclaim their independence from the men of the church, refusing to learn "in quietness and full submission" (verse 11), seeking roles that have been given to men in the church (verse 12), they will make the same mistake Eve made and bring similar disaster on themselves and the church.<sup>31</sup>

The final verse of 1 Timothy 2 is difficult to interpret. If it means that women will be saved through "The Childbirth" (that is, the birth of Christ), then it might be understood as an allusion to Gen. 3:15.<sup>32</sup> But then why would Paul use the word "childbearing"?<sup>33</sup>

It also seems unlikely that we should understand the word "saved" in a physical (kept safely through childbearing) sense.<sup>34</sup> It does not accord with the way Paul normally uses the term, nor does it make good sense with the last part of the verse.



The most common interpretation is that women will be saved by being true to their primary roles, especially motherhood.<sup>35</sup> In this case, "childbearing" is a synecdoche (a figure of speech in which the part is used for the whole) for women's role in the home. Paul, of course, does not mean to say it is necessary for a woman to bear children to be saved, but uses one typical aspect of woman's role in the home to stand for the whole.

As with 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, some have maintained that 1 Timothy 2 refers not to men and women generally, but to husbands and wives.<sup>36</sup> But again there are contextual problems with this approach. Are only husbands to lift up holy hands in prayer? Are only wives to dress in good deeds rather than showy attire?<sup>37</sup>

The use of Genesis in 1 Timothy 2 is similar to that in 1 Corinthians 11 and (if "the law says" refers to Genesis) 14. Once again Paul turns to Genesis 2 to support the concept that women should be subordinate to men. The major difference is the additional reference to the deception of Eve in Genesis 3.

## CONCLUSION

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Paul encouraged women to accept a subordinate role in the church (and, as is demonstrated in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5, in the home), not simply because it was the cultural norm of his day, but because he believed it was God's will as demonstrated in the creation story of Genesis 2. It is, therefore, problematic to treat his statements on this matter as if they can be dismissed as purely an accommodation to culture.

But two factors need to be constantly considered in our efforts to appropriate Paul's remarks to our situations. The first is that his inspired interpretation of Genesis supports the general principle of submission, but does not spell out every application. I think we have rightly judged that there is no inherent connection between women's submission and wearing veils, and that in our society since the connection no longer holds, the veil is no longer necessary.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand,

appointing a woman elder would inherently violate the concept of submission to men in the church. In between these two are many activities and roles which are less clear. As in matters like clothing, we must constantly reappraise our practice in the light of both scriptural principles and cultural norms.

Second, it is important to note Paul's realization of and concern about men abusing their authoritative role. This seems to be present in 1 Cor. 11:11, 12, but it is most apparent in Eph. 5:25-33, where he belabors the point about men loving their wives like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. If men would take these instructions to heart, it would be much easier for women to accept what is now often a very difficult role.

I would like to conclude with a possible interpretation of Gen. 3:16. ("I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.") The meaning of the last phrase is not clear. But if we accept Paul's interpretation of Genesis 2, then it is not the origin of the subordination of women. Instead, it may refer to the sinful distortion of man's authority. That may be why Paul does not refer to it when he speaks of the divine design concerning women's subordinate role.

As Christians, we should strive against this curse as we do all the others in Gen. 3:16-19. We should not seek to overturn God's will for the roles of men and women in the home or the church, but we should strive to get beyond the curse and back to the garden.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Christians for Biblical Equality published a declaration entitled "Men, Women, and Biblical Equality" as an advertisement in *Christianity Today* 34 (9 April, 1990): 36-37. Their viewpoint is represented by most (but not all) of the papers published in Alvera Mickelsen, ed., *Women, Authority and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986). The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood published a declaration entitled "The Danvers Statement" as an advertisement in *Christianity Today* 33 (13 January, 1989): 40-41. Their views are represented by all of the articles in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, ed., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Woman-*



hood: *A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991). For a shorter survey of evangelical views, see Bonnidell and Robert G. Clouse, eds., *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>Richard Oster, "When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11:4," *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 481-505, provides a historical background which suggests Paul's comments about men wearing veils are not merely hypothetical.

<sup>3</sup>*The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978).

<sup>4</sup>Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *Kephalē* in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1954): 211-15. In support of Bedale's position see Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 501-5, and the literature cited there.

<sup>5</sup>Wayne Grudem, "Does *Kephalē* ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* n.s. 6 (1985): 38-59; idem, "The Meaning of *Kephalē* ('Head'): A Response to Recent Studies," in *Recovering*, 425-68; Joseph Fitzmyer, "Another Look at *Kephalē* in 1 Corinthians 11:3," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 503-11.

<sup>6</sup>Antionette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990), 120.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*; Fee, 515-16.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity: 1 Cor. 11:2-16," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991), 133.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 177-78. Hurley's book is one of the best representations of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood's perspective.

<sup>11</sup>See Fee, 521-22, for references and for other possible interpretations of the phrase.

<sup>12</sup>E. Erle Ellis, *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 59-60.

<sup>13</sup>Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 66-67, 168.

<sup>14</sup>*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990).

<sup>15</sup>Wire, 280, n. 9.

<sup>16</sup>See especially Fee, 699-705.

<sup>17</sup>D. A. Carson, "'Silent in the Churches': On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.:

Crossway Books, 1991), 141-45.

<sup>18</sup>For example, Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989), 144-53.

<sup>19</sup>Carson, 147-51.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 151-53.

<sup>21</sup>See Ellis, 67-71.

<sup>22</sup>For example, Carson, 151.

<sup>23</sup>See especially Carroll D. Osburn, "Authenteō (1 Timothy 2:12)," *Restoration Quarterly* 25 (1982): 1-12; Catherine C. Kroeger, "1 Timothy 2:12—A Classicist's View," in *Women, Authority, and the Bible*, 225-44; idem, "Women in the Church: A Classicist's View of 1 Timothy 2:11-15," *Journal of Biblical Equality* 1 (1989): 3-31 (and the responses in the same journal, 32-49); George W. Knight, "Authenteō in Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 143-57; Leland E. Wilshire, "The TLG Computer and Further Reference to *Authenteō* in 1 Timothy 2:12," *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 120-34.

<sup>24</sup>See the previous note for references.

<sup>25</sup>Douglas Moo, "What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men? 1 Timothy 2:11-15," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991), 186.

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, David M. Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," in *Women, Authority, and the Bible*, 208; Philip B. Payne, "Libertarian Women at Ephesus: A Response to Douglas J. Moo's Article '1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance,'" *Trinity Journal* (1981): 175-76.

<sup>27</sup>Douglas Moo, "The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15: A Rejoinder," *Trinity Journal* 2 (1981): 202-4.

<sup>28</sup>Hurley, 207-9.

<sup>29</sup>Robert D. Culver, "A Traditional View: Let Your Women Keep Silence," in *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 36-37.

<sup>30</sup>Moo, "What Does It Mean?" 190.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>Payne, 177-81.

<sup>33</sup>Moo, "What Does It Mean?" 192.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>See, for example, Moo, "What Does It Mean?" 192; Scholer, 196-97.

<sup>36</sup>Ellis, 72-74.

<sup>37</sup>Moo, "1 Timothy 2:11-15," 63-64.

<sup>38</sup>See especially Richard Oster, "Culture or Binding Principle—A Study of Head Coverings, Hairstyles, Etc. (1 Corinthians 11:1-16)," in *The Church of God in a Pagan World: Studies in First Corinthians*, Harding University 1990 Lectureship, 427-55.



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## MODELS FOR IMITATION: GENESIS IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

James W. Thompson

P. T. Forsyth, the Scottish preacher, began his classic work *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* with the words, "I will venture to say that with its preaching Christianity stands or falls."<sup>1</sup> Forsyth recognized that preaching had been the center of Christian faith and worship for centuries. From the time of the Protestant Reformation its importance had vastly increased. But if Forsyth is correct in his statement that "Christianity stands or falls" with its preaching, one must conclude that the quality of preaching has varied enormously through the centuries. Thus while preaching has always been a uniquely Christian activity, not all preaching is equally helpful. If Christianity "stands or falls" with its preaching, the church has known times of great preaching that continued the tradition of the ancient church, and it has known periods when preaching failed to sustain the church.

If preaching is vital to the existence of the church, we have the important task of identifying the qualities of good preaching. Forsyth correctly argued that where the preaching sustains the church, it is distinguished neither by the oratorical skills nor the personal appeal of the preacher. It is sustained by his charter, the Bible. In his book *Biblical Interpretations in Preaching*, Gerhard von Rad offered an excellent description of good preaching.

The best sermons are those in which one notes the preacher's own surprise that—and how—the text suddenly began to speak. I have heard sermons in which one had the feeling that the preacher only stepped to one side



in order to let the text speak. . . . In the church struggle (during the Nazi regime) I heard sermons in which the text slipped out of the preacher's hands and fell from the pulpit; it was so incredibly timely and pertinent that the preacher completely lost control over it.<sup>2</sup>

Good preaching, according to both writers, takes place when the ancient text addresses the preacher's own audience.

### PREACHING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament provides a valuable insight into the nature of good preaching by including one sermon to a Christian audience. Hebrews is probably the oldest recorded sermon to a Christian audience. While Acts has abundant examples of missionary sermons, Hebrews is the New Testament's only model of a sermon to a Christian audience. The unknown author, who was unable to speak to his original readers in person, has sent them a "word of exhortation" (Heb. 13:22). Although this document has been called "the Epistle to the Hebrews" since the second century, it does not have the distinguishing marks of an epistle. The author, who speaks with an eloquence unparalleled in the New Testament, is anonymous, perhaps preferring that his words make a stronger impression than his personality.

The words within this "word of exhortation" are scarcely the author's words at all, for this preacher addresses his readers with the words of Scripture, "which is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword." The Scripture, which the author reads in the Greek translation, is more than an ancient document from the past. Here the author discovers a message which continues to address his own community with encouragement and warning. The author's task is merely to call the community's attention to the powerful word which confronts them in their hour of trial. At times the author quotes his Bible at great length, while at other times he prefers to speak with allusions to Scripture. He quotes from all parts of his Bible. He knows the law, the prophets, and the writings. His Bible, the Old Testament, provides the vocabulary for all that he says to

his community.

If, in good preaching, ancient texts speak to the concerns of the audience, the author of Hebrews offers us an exemplary model for good preaching. He knows the needs of his community well. They have "drooping hands" and "weak knees." Having experienced an initial enthusiasm at the beginning of their Christian life, they now suffer from discouragement and the temptation to abandon their hope for the future reward. The endless days of waiting are more difficult for them to bear than the hardship of persecution which they had experienced earlier.

When the author of Hebrews turns to the Word of God that is "living and active," he does not speak in a vacuum. The ancient text speaks to the community in its hour of trial. The preacher brings together the ancient text with his own audience. He confronts them, not with his own opinions, but with the power of Scripture.

### GENESIS IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Hebrews is often remembered for its use of the legal portions of the Old Testament: In the central section Exodus and Leviticus provide the categories for the author's description of the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. However, the law includes Genesis also, and the author of Hebrews makes frequent use of the first book of the Bible. It provides the author with descriptive language, with models of obedience and disobedience, with a "great cloud of witnesses," and with a glimpse of the temptations of those who were the forefathers in the faith. In Heb. 6:7, 8, the author addresses a community which stands before the decision to remain faithful or to abandon the faith. Having warned them of the severe consequences of apostasy, he now compares them to land which either "brings forth vegetation" or "bears thorns and thistles." The former "receives a blessing" from God, while the latter is "near to being cursed." This solemn reminder of the choice that lies before Christians employs the language of the first three chapters of Genesis. Gen. 1:11, 12 speaks of the original creation



which "brought forth vegetation," while Gen. 3:17, 18 speaks of the condition of the earth after the fall in which it bears "thorns and thistles." Genesis has here provided the preacher with the descriptive language for confronting the community with the decision that it must make.

Genesis does far more, however, than provide descriptive language for the author of Hebrews. The readers are challenged to see in the lives of their forefathers the same critical issues which they now face. Indeed, the forefathers of Genesis become both good and bad examples for the readers as they struggle with their own temptations. While we are never told that the readers are in fact Jews, we have no doubt that the preacher presents the individual characters of Genesis as heroes from whom they may learn.

In Heb. 4:11, the author recalls the wilderness generation, only to conclude for his readers, "Let us strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience." Here the wilderness generation has left the negative example (*hypo-deigma*) for the church. The stern wording of Ps. 95:11 is recalled, according to which "they shall never enter my rest." For the author of Hebrews, the wilderness story is a reminder that Israel's history contained more than the examples of faith recorded in chapter 11. The wilderness episode was an unmitigated disaster. Even if two of those who had originally left Egypt were in fact allowed to enter the promised land, the author mentions no exceptions to the verdict that "they shall never enter my rest." Israel failed in the wilderness because of her unbelief, her failure to persevere (Heb. 3:19).

However, even that depressing story had its encouraging side. The psalmist had given the verdict, "They shall never enter my rest." It was God's judgment on disobedient Israel. However, the words from the psalmist are juxtaposed in Heb. 4:4 with the words of Gen. 2:2: "God rested on the seventh day from all his works." The idea that "God rested" is a reminder that the solemn verdict of Ps. 95:11 was not the end of the story. Even if Israel failed to enter God's rest, his "rest" remains available for the people of God. God's "rest" on the seventh day is a reminder that he invites his people to share in his rest.

"God's rest" is not merely the earthly Canaan. It is the eternal resting place to which God invites his people. Thus those who are tired from a long journey and almost to the point of dropping out can continue on their pilgrimage, knowing that "there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." The story of God's rest from his labors from Gen. 2:2 was a reminder that he invites his people to share in a rest that is still available for those who persevere to the end.

For those who struggle with the temptation to abandon the faith, Genesis offers models whom they may imitate. A discouraged community, thinking that it alone suffers from discouragement, suffers from the lack of resources for remaining faithful. But a community which has heroes from the past can find new resources. For this reason, the author of Hebrews challenges his readers with the desire that each one of them "show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:11, 12). The Old Testament provided those examples of "faith and patience."

We are not surprised that the author, having mentioned the models from the past, opens his next paragraph with the story of Abraham. He, his children, and grandchildren stand at the center of Genesis 12—50. Indeed the narratives about Abraham are so significant that subsequent generations would always look back to Abraham as their forefather. The wealth of stories about Abraham in Genesis 12—25 would be a rich source for instruction for Jewish writers. Paul and James both appeal to Abraham as their example (Romans 4; Galatians 3; James 2). John the Baptist warns his listeners that descent from Abraham did not make one Abraham's child, for "God is able from these stones to raise up children of Abraham" (Lk. 3:8).

There was much to recall about Abraham, as Elie Wiesel suggests in *Messengers of God*. He was "the first enemy of idolatry," according to Jewish tradition. He was "the first to reject civilization and be a minority of one."<sup>3</sup> He was the father of the faithful. And yet Genesis does not hesitate to tell the whole story of Abraham. When God chose to destroy the cities



of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham dared to question him. Abraham did not tell the truth when he was asked about the identity of Sarah, apparently not placing his situation sufficiently in the hands of God. When God promised a son, Abraham grew tired of waiting. First, he tried to assist God by turning to a handmaid to be the mother of the promised child. And then, when the announcement was made that he would have a son, the subject was treated with so much disbelief that the promised son was called "Isaac" or "laughter." Abraham was remembered as a man of faith, but he was also remembered for the occasions when he did not trust God enough.

And yet Abraham was the "father of the faithful," for he never ceased to believe in God's promise. For this reason he becomes the great example to the readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews. They are told that their forefathers did not receive instantaneous fulfillment to the promises of God. Abraham heard the promise that is recorded in Heb. 6:14: "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." But he received the promise only when he "patiently endured."

The Greek word rendered in the RSV for "patiently endured" ("waited patiently"; NIV) in Heb. 6:15 is *makrothumeo*. The noun form *makrothumia* appears in Heb. 6:12, and is translated "patience" in the RSV, NIV, and ASV. The term is sometimes rendered "longsuffering." It accents waiting, endurance, and tenacity. Later in the epistle, the author says to his own readers, "You need endurance" (*hypomone*). A tired community is reminded that the father of the faithful received the promises only after he had "patiently endured."

While Abraham was waiting on God, with no visible assurances anywhere that the waiting would be worthwhile, all that he had to rely on was God's oath. The author of Hebrews emphasizes that, in the promise to Abraham, "God swore" (Gen. 22:16; Heb. 6:13), thus adding confirmation to the promise. In the same way, says the author, God has sworn to Christians, the heirs of the promise to Abraham. Just as Abraham could rely on God's oath in the seemingly endless days of waiting, Christians have a "hope that is set before" them (Heb. 6:18). This hope has entered behind the curtain that separates

heaven and earth (Heb. 6:19), and it offers Christians the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul to which they may cling in their days of uncertainty. The exaltation of Jesus Christ is nothing less than God's oath to his people.

In Jesus' exaltation he has become the high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Because he is the high priest after the order of Melchizedek, Christians know that they may now draw near to God in the full assurance that their entreaties are heard. Thus while Christians have grown weary from waiting for the future, they, like Abraham, recognize what God has done in the past. God's saving deed in the past is the "anchor of the soul" to which Christians may cling.

To have faith is to wait on God. Our forefather in the faith waited a lifetime on God because he believed in God's oath. According to Hebrews, Christians have also received the oath of God. Those who have received the oath have the tenacity to wait patiently on God in order to receive the promise.

## OTHER MOMENTS IN THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM

The author of Hebrews recalls Abraham not only because he exemplified the patient endurance he asks of his Christian readers. Abraham is remembered also because he once encountered that mysterious figure named Melchizedek, who appears on the stage in Genesis as quickly as he leaves it. We know about him only that he was the king of Salem. When he met Abraham, he blessed Abraham and received tithes from him, according to Gen. 14:17-20.

The Jewish tradition was fascinated with the scene because it left many unanswered questions. The rabbis wondered who Melchizedek was. Legend grew up around him. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, he is presented as an angelic figure.

The author of Hebrews recalls the one remaining passage about Melchizedek from the Old Testament. Ps. 110:4 says, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." When the author of Hebrews recalls the scene of Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek, he associates that scene with Ps. 110:4. Whereas Jewish tradition read the story to demonstrate



the greatness of Abraham, the author of Hebrews shows that Abraham appropriately paid homage to Melchizedek. When Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek and received his blessing, he was recognizing the greatness of the "order of Melchizedek." This "order of Melchizedek" is an anticipation of the priesthood of Christ. Abraham was the first to recognize a priesthood that is vastly superior to the levitical priesthood. In that encounter between two "orders" of priesthood, Abraham pointed the way for Christians. Their anchor of the soul is not the priesthood that descended from Abraham, but the one that was superior to it. Consequently, they can draw near to God, not in an earthly tabernacle, but in a heavenly realm.

Besides the major treatment of Abraham in chapter 11, which I shall treat in the next lesson, the ancestor of all Israel is remembered in an exhortation that comes at the end of the book. The readers of Hebrews, like the readers of numerous other epistles of the New Testament, are reminded of the value of hospitality for their communities (Heb. 13:2). Hospitality—*philoxenia*, the "friendship with strangers"—deepened relationships between Christians all over the empire. In a world where only the upper classes could find a safe place to stay while traveling, Christians opened their homes to strangers. For the author of Hebrews, Abraham was the first to show hospitality, "for he entertained angels unawares" (Gen. 18:1-8). Abraham is the model not only of faith, but of hospitality as well.

This story of Abraham, like the many other stories in Genesis, provides a needed resource for a people who were now drifting aimlessly. Such people, according to the author of Hebrews, are provided a needed resource in the stories of Genesis. These stories provide models of endurance, heroes with whom they can identify, and a deeper understanding of the God who keeps his promises on his own schedule.

In *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye keeps his balance by means of his tradition. For the author of Hebrews, committed Christians maintain their balance by the Word of God that is "living and active." Genesis serves as a voice for the author's own time. For the modern reader, both Genesis and Hebrews allow us to

keep our balance in a world where the foundations seem to crumble.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Biblical Interpretations in Preaching* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 17.

<sup>3</sup>Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God* (New York: Pocket Books, 1977), 85.

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## FAITH OF OUR FATHERS: GENESIS IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

James W. Thompson

During the Nazi occupation of Norway, they imprisoned Eivind Berggrav, a leading churchman, because he spoke out against the regime. When he felt the persecution of the Nazis, he said, "Have you ever noticed how full of life the Bible has become, as if written for people in war and during times of occupation?"<sup>1</sup> He recognized what others have noted: that the Bible addresses situations that are so similar to our own that we easily identify with our forefathers in the faith and hear words addressed to ancient people as if they were addressed to us.

If the Bible seems to be addressed directly to us in our own situation, we undoubtedly find in it meanings we never noticed before in passages that have already become familiar to us. In Hebrews 11, the author of Hebrews finds powerful new meanings to old stories which no one had noticed before. Hebrews 11, one of the most rhetorically powerful passages in the entire Bible, has been described as the "roll call of faith" from the Old Testament. Associated with the names of the great characters of the Old Testament is the stirring refrain "by faith." However, of the "men of old" whose names are mentioned here, the Old Testament attributes faith only to Abraham, who "believed God and it was reckoned for righteousness," according to Gen. 15:6. Neither the Old Testament nor Jewish tradition speaks explicitly of the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, and the others whose witness is recalled in Hebrews 11. But for the author of Hebrews, "these all died in faith" (Heb. 11:13). They were the "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) who preceded the Christians and now wait for the church to finish the course.

The forefathers of the past are recalled as heroes of faith

because the author of Hebrews is addressing a community that is struggling with its own faith. "You have need of endurance," the author says to his community (Heb. 10:36). They have "drooping hands" and "weak knees" (Heb. 12:12). Thus prior to Hebrews 11, the author has called the hearers' attention to the need for faith. In Heb. 3:12 he says, "Take care lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." He urges his hearers to go on in their commitment, assuring them that "we who have believed enter that rest" (Heb. 4:3). He warns his readers with a reminder that not all of the forefathers were witnesses of faith. The wilderness generation failed to enter the promised land because of its unbelief (Heb. 3:19). Moreover, the good news which has come to the church first came to the wilderness generation, according to Heb. 4:2: "... but the message which they heard did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith in the hearers." Thus the issue of faith is not isolated to Hebrews 11; it is the thread running through the book. The readers are challenged to learn from forefathers who failed because of unbelief, and to imitate forefathers who "through faith and patience inherited the promises" (Heb. 6:12).

Faith is a dominant concern in Hebrews because the ancient listeners were on the boundary between faith and unbelief. They are described in the epistle as the wandering people of God who, like ancient Israel, have come through the barren wasteland after enduring years of waiting for the promises to be fulfilled. They are now deciding if they, like ancient Israel, will fail to inherit the promise because of their lack of endurance. The author has reminded them that Jesus is the "pioneer" (Heb. 2:10) and "forerunner" (Heb. 6:20) who has gone before them into the promised land, having endured all of the temptations which they face. Now he beckons them to endure.

In Heb. 10:39, immediately before the author of Hebrews launches into the great chapter on faith, he issues the challenge: "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls." Here faith is contrasted to "shrinking back," the failure to endure. Faith is here used in the sense which it has in the Old Testament, of



being "steadfast" or "faithful." We find this meaning in the quotation from Hab. 2:4, which appears in Heb. 10:37. Here "faith" involves the "faithfulness" of the one who refuses to "shrink back" in the midst of discouragement. In this context, faith is the equivalent of the endurance that is mentioned in Heb. 10:36. This challenge sets the stage for the great chapter on faith. The people who need endurance and faithfulness are provided models of faithfulness from the Old Testament. Of these models, a primary focus falls on Genesis. Heb. 11:4-22 describes the heroes of Genesis. Verses 23 through 37 recall the stories from the remaining narrative portions of the Old Testament.

What is faith? The Bible seldom offers definitions. The author of Hebrews, however, offers a definition of faith before he recalls the stories of faith. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," according to the RSV. According to the KJV, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This is not a comprehensive definition of faith, but it is an appropriate introduction to the stories of faith.

According to the author of Hebrews, faith is no subjective feeling. The KJV captures well the understanding of faith in Hebrews when it says that faith is "substance" and "evidence." The word "substance" renders well the Greek word *hypostasis*, which means something solid under one's feet. Faith, therefore, involves standing on firm ground. One might translate the word *hypostasis* as "reality." That is, faith means building one's life on the solid foundation of that which is real rather than ephemeral.

In the parallel word "evidence" or "conviction," we see also this emphasis that faith rests on solid ground. The word means "proof," "means of proof," "conviction," or "reality." Thus when the author of Hebrews says that faith is "substance" and "conviction," he accents that faithful people have a foundation on which they can build their lives. Faithful people know what is real.

What is the reality on which we build our lives? In our own culture, we treat as "real" the objects that we can see and touch.

We struggle to invest in "securities" because they are supposed to be permanent investments. We speak of "real property" as if land has the permanent value that brings security. It was no different at the end of the first century. What was "real" were the items that one could see and touch. The ancient pagans ridiculed Christians because they asked for faith rather than knowledge. Perhaps the readers of Hebrews had concluded that they could go on with the struggle if only they could see something tangible. But the author of Hebrews says that what is real is "what is hoped for" and "what is unseen." Others believe that the "real world" is made up of things that can be accumulated, but faith involves knowing that the "real world" is "hoped for" and "unseen." Those who know that the real world is "hoped for" and "unseen" can endure when they see no visible assurances of their faith.

According to Heb. 11:2, the "men of old" lived by this definition of faith. According to the RSV, they "received divine approval." The KJV says, "By it they received a good report." Literally, they "were attested" in their conviction that the real world was the unseen world. The root word is "bear witness" (*martureo*), used here in the passive voice. They were "witnesses" to the reality of faith. Thus the author can later recall that the church is surrounded by "a great cloud of witnesses" who have prepared the way for the church (Heb. 12:1). The heroes of the past were "witnesses" to the church to the idea, considered absurd by the world, that the real world is the unseen world and that one can build his life on a hope that has not been fulfilled.

This definition of faith is the operative principle for the author's memory of past heroes. Abel "received divine approval" and became a witness to the nature of faith. In some way, he looked toward that unseen future. Genesis says that his blood "cries out" (Gen. 4:10), a phrase which the author of Hebrews twice recalls. In Heb. 11:4, Abel "is still speaking" through his faith. In Heb. 12:24, the blood of Jesus "speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel."

All of the other heroes of Genesis built their lives on this "unseen" world. Noah, having been warned by God about



"events as yet unseen," built the ark. Abraham gave up what he could see in Ur in order to go to a land he could not yet see and receive it as an inheritance (Heb. 11:8). He looked forward to a "city whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). Even Sarah, whom we remember in the Old Testament for her laughter, is recalled as looking for the promise of unseen things (Heb. 11:12). They were all looking for a promise, a homeland (Heb. 11:14), a better country, a heavenly one (Heb. 11:15), a city (Heb. 11:16). For all of the heroes of faith, faith involved building one's existence on an unseen world, knowing that what no one could see was the real world.

To build one's life on an unseen world is not to enjoy a life of ease in this world. Abel, the first man of faith, witnessed by his death. Noah, who also looked to the unseen world, was alienated from this world. In Heb. 11:7, we are told that Noah, in building the ark, "condemned the world." Noah, the man of faith, was alienated from the culture in which he lived. Undoubtedly, his building of the ark on the basis of things unseen was the height of absurdity to a world which believed that the real world was composed of things that could be seen and touched. Thus Noah, in his faith, became a stranger in the world in which he lived.

The other men of faith were aliens in their own world also. Those who looked for a better homeland became aliens in their own lands. When the author of Hebrews looks to the heroes of Genesis, he gives special attention to Abraham, for he accents to the "wandering people of God" in his own day that Abraham was a pilgrim as well. The attention is focused on Abraham in verses 8 through 19. According to Heb. 11:8, the author recalls that Abraham was called to "go out" from his homeland. In Heb. 11:9, we are reminded that Abraham "sojourned . . . as in a foreign land, living in tents." In Heb. 11:13, Abraham is especially in mind when the author says that "these all died in faith," and that they were "strangers and exiles on earth." At the end of this majestic chapter, the author of Hebrews returns to the same theme when he summarizes the story of all of the heroes of faith: "They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, of whom the world was not

worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." The long history of faith demonstrated that those who believe that the real world is the unseen future which God has prepared will also be strangers in this world. Faith involves the pain of being an exile, with all of the ridicule and discrimination that strangers and exiles may face.

In 1937 Ernst Käsemann wrote his classic work on the Epistle to the Hebrews, entitled *The Wandering People of God*, from a prison cell in Hitler's Germany. He later wrote that he chose to write a book on Hebrews during those trying times because he wanted to encourage those who were struggling for their faith and remind them that faith involves being a stranger and an alien in the midst of a barren wasteland.<sup>2</sup> According to Hebrews, faith means enduring ridicule, homelessness, and frustration from the world because the real world lies in the future.

The author of Hebrews speaks with extraordinary realism when he says of the heroes of the faith, "These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar" (Heb. 11:13). The line is repeated at the end of this great chapter (v. 39). In one sense, of course, the promises were fulfilled, for the author challenges his readers in Heb. 6:12 to imitate those "who through faith and patience inherit the promises." But in the larger sense, the heroes of faith "did not receive what was promised." Throughout their entire lives, they could only greet it from afar. There was never a moment when they could see and touch the object of their faith, never a moment when they could say to the world around them, "I told you so." As long as they lived, they built their lives on "things unseen." Faith offered no daily signs or assurances that God would keep his promises. Those heroes of faith "died in faith, not having received what was promised."

Although the heroes of faith "did not receive what was promised," their commitment was not in vain, for Hebrews 11 ends with a charge to the assembled community to recognize that "what has been promised" still lies before us. Thus the heroes of faith are the "great cloud of witnesses" who have passed on the faith to each generation of the readers. Every







## **MY GOD AND I**

**Helen Mattox Young**

### **FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF GOD**

My early concept of God was influenced greatly by my father's persistence in seeing that I memorized Scripture. And as he drilled me, he tried to explain to me what the verses meant. He helped me memorize Psalms 1; 19; 23; 24; 100; 121; etc., Isaiah 53 and 55, the beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and many other verses in the New Testament. The KJV was his favorite for memorization because of its stately and poetic beauty. He loved the Word of God so much that I have often thought that his epitaph should read, "His delight was in the law of the Lord and in this law did he meditate day and night."

I am grateful for this heritage for it continues to bless my life. Of course, as I repeat these passages in adulthood, they become more and more meaningful, but those first impressions remain the basis of my faith.

### **GOD IS REAL, THOUGH UNSEEN**

What does it mean to say, "God"? I cannot define him. As Augustine said when he was asked for a definition, "When I am not asked, I know very well, but when I am asked I do not know at all." But he is nonetheless real because he cannot be defined. He is nonetheless real because he cannot be seen. Most of the things most important to us cannot be seen. Love has no shape or color. Faith and hope have no visible substance. But they are real. As Paul said, "For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). So God is a person, alive and



active. Though we do not see him, he is in control of our world and of our lives.

### *Our Goal—To Know Him*

We spend our lives seeking to know many things, some of them good, some of them useless, some of them destructive. But of all our goals in life the pre-eminent one should be to know God. In the movingly beautiful prayer in John 17, Jesus prays to the Father, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn. 17:3).

### *Distorted Views of God*

How tragic not to know him or to have a distorted view of him. I heard of a conversation with a woman who had begun her career as an educator, but had become involved with union activities, and later with politics. Her friend recounted that when she spoke to her of spiritual matters, the woman startled her by saying, "There probably isn't a God, and if there is he might be a she."

## HE HAS REVEALED HIMSELF

Why would some have distorted pictures of God? It is not that God has failed to reveal himself to us. We see evidence of him all around us. As children our first textbook about God is nature. The beauties of the earth tell of him. The heavens declare his glory. But how blessed we are that he has revealed himself through the Bible. The sacred page is our written source of knowledge of him. It should be the search of our lives to know him through his Word.

### *His Fullest Revelation*

But God gave us his final and fullest revelation in the person of Jesus. When Philip asked, "Lord, show us the Father," Jesus told his disciples, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. . . . I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn. 14:8, 9, 11).

### *What Is God Like?*

Even though we cannot define God, we can in a way describe

him. The Bible uses many metaphors and similes to help us understand his nature. So that we will understand his strength, he is called a refuge, a fortress, and a rock. So that we can understand his nurturing care, he is called a farmer and a shepherd. To help us know his love, he is called a lover, a husband, a bridegroom, and especially a father.

### *Basic Truths About God*

In our search to know God, we will never feel we have arrived. There will always be mystery, for he is transcendent. He said, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is. 55:9). But we can know much about him:

God is beyond our understanding.

God has spoken to men. The Bible is his Word, given to make us wise unto salvation.

God is Lord and King over his world. He rules all things to his glory. He is alive and at work in his world.

God is perfect and unchangeable. He cannot be better.

God is infinite, all present, all-knowing, and eternal.

God is all powerful. He is purposeful. He has a plan for the universe. He controls all without violating the free will of his creatures. He will achieve his goals.

God is self-existent and self-sufficient. When children ask, "Who made God?" the answer is, "God did not need to be made, for he has always been."

God is triune: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, so when we say, "God," we mean all three.

God is judge. The unfaithful and disobedient will be punished. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (Jn. 3:36).

God is Saviour. In love through Jesus Christ he rescued believers from guilt and the power of sin. He forgives the penitent.

God is love. "He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Jn. 4:3). He shows us how to love, even our enemies.

God is holy. He abhors evil. He calls us to holiness and



empowers us to grow into his likeness.

### *How Do We Respond to Such a God?*

His holiness causes us to want to fall down before him in awe and say with Peter, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man," or with Isaiah when he saw the vision of God, "Woe is me. I am ruined! I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). But on the other hand, his love draws us to him and we long to worship him with praise and adoration, to glorify him. We want to obey him, be submissive to him, serve him. Above all, we want to trust him and become like him.

### *The Fatherhood of God*

Of all the descriptions of God, the one that we love the most is the one Jesus taught us in the model prayer. He is our father. Jesus thought of him most in this way. In fact, the first recorded sentence of Jesus was spoken in the temple at the age of twelve when he said to his mother, "Don't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Lk. 2:49). And his last words from the cross were these, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk. 23:46). In the Old Testament God is spoken of as Father six or seven times, but in the New Testament he is called Father between two hundred and three hundred times.

### *He Is My Father*

What do you think of when you hear the word "father"? All of us will have different pictures in our minds. Each person's experience with his authority figure—his earthly father—usually is transferred to how he relates to God. In our day when many children have had bad experiences, the concept of God may be distorted. The boy who is slapped around by a drunken father and the girl who is sexually abused by her father will have a hard time seeing God as he really is. Earthly fathers sometimes will be unkind, inconsistent, tyrannical, selfish, and cruel, but in the Bible God reveals himself as a gentle, forgiving Father. He is not a stern taskmaster or a policeman who is trying to catch you in a mistake. He is one who is patient and understanding. He knows how frail we are. "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on

those who fear him" (Ps. 103:13).

### *A Father Who Is Faithful*

You may have memories of broken promises from your earthly father, but your Father God keeps every promise. You may tend to be cynical and to distrust others because of bad experiences, but you can completely trust God. "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you. . . . I am with you always even to the end of the age" (Heb. 13:5; Mt. 28:20; NASB). He is present in your life today. He waits with outstretched arms saying, "I came that you might have life and that more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10; NASB). "Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, He remains faithful to us who are part of himself, and He will always carry out His promises to us" (2 Tim. 2:13; LB).

### *A Father Who Is Generous*

How extravagantly generous is our Father God to us in nature. He gives us such beauty in the sunset, the ocean waves, the mountain forest. His use of color, of design, of order is so complex. The variety of his creation in plants and animals is manifold. The numbers of the stars and galaxies in the heavens are extravagant. Far beyond what we would consider practical is his provision of beauty and usefulness in creation. And his provision for us personally is so generous. He sends the rain on the just and the unjust. The psalmist says, "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it" (Ps. 37:3-5; NASB).

### *A Father Who Is Affectionate and Attentive*

Does it comfort you to know that God is thinking about you? That you are precious to him? He is not too distant to care. He is not too busy to be concerned. Even though there are five billion people in the world, he is listening to you. He even knows how many hairs are on your head. One of the amazing qualities of God is his ability to give 24-hour-a-day attention to you. You do not have to beg for his attention. He is listening. "Let Him have all your worries and cares, for He is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns



you" (1 Pet. 5:7; LB).

#### *A Father Who Is Able and Willing*

Paul prayed to the Father in these words, "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20). There is nothing our Father God cannot do. Such faith should make us bold in our prayers and confident of his working in our lives. Not only is he able, but he is willing. Jesus was expressing the heart of God when he said to the leper who begged him for healing, "I am willing. Be clean" (Mk. 1:40, 41). He is able and he is eager to help you.

#### *A Father Who Is Forgiving and Accepting*

All of us have sinned and been sinned against. There is no peace with our Father if we harbor resentment and ill will toward those who have hurt us, and there is no peace when our guilt consumes us. But thank God, we can find release from all bitterness and grudges toward others as we forgive the hurts. Our forgiveness of others is the bridge over which we walk to receive God's forgiveness.

God is the perfect parent. He does not say our sin does not matter. It breaks his heart, but if we will turn in repentance, as the prodigal son did, he delights to forgive. He loved the prodigal while he was in the far country. But the prodigal's honesty about his sin and his repentance allowed him to experience again loving fellowship with his Father. The Scripture uses graphic metaphors to describe how completely God forgives the penitent. He removes our sins "as far as the East is from the West." They are hidden "in the depths of the sea." "They will be remembered against us "no more, forever." Amazing grace!

Our world offers conditional acceptance—if we make good grades, if we are handsome or beautiful, if we have a winning personality, if we have a large bank account. But God's love is unconditional. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

All through life we have to compete and perform and are compared with others. But God delights in our uniqueness. He

knows our limits and our strengths. He gives us power and grace to do his will. So we can be content and rest in his loving acceptance. "He will save. He will rejoice over thee with joy. He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zeph. 3:17).

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## A WOMAN CONFRONTS GOD

Helen Mattox Young

As women, we confront God every day—in the beauty of the sunrise, in the smile of a child, in the peace of prayer and meditation, and in the rush of daily living and service. We confront God in our own natures and in the natures of those around us, however imperfect that image may be. For we were all made by God in his likeness.

When God created the world, he called his creation “good.” It was only when he created us that he called his creation “very good.”

The account of our creation in Genesis includes a statement of God’s purpose in making us. God’s Word is our instruction manual. Just as the manual which comes with a small appliance tells how that appliance is supposed to operate and what we should and should not do to keep it in good working order, God’s Word tells us what we were designed to do and how we can remain in good spiritual repair.

He tells us that we were created in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26, 27; NIV). Because of that fact, we as women have a great potential and a wonderful challenge—to be Godlike, to live up to what we are. He also gave us dominion over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:28). This gives us great power and an awesome responsibility—to take good care of our environment and of those people he has entrusted to our care.

God has provided the necessities of life—a home, food, and other physical blessings. He created the institution of marriage to provide us with companionship, cooperation, and sexual expression (Gen. 2:18, 20, 24).

But God was not the only one at work in the garden. The

serpent challenged the woman God made and threatened her potential, power, and provision by raising the specter of doubt. “Did God *really* say . . . ?” he asked.

This is a challenge we hear often today. “Did God really say that he answers prayer?”; “Did God really say that he’s with us when we worship him—even if our number is small?”; “Did God really say that we have victory in Jesus?”

We need to know what God says about our function and preservation. We need to have the conviction that his Word is true and his promises can be trusted. We need to be able to say confidently, as Paul did, that “I know whom I have believed and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

Let us look at some of the women of Genesis in their dealings with God and see if we cannot discover some principles for our own spiritual lives and purposes.

### EVE

After Eve had yielded to the serpent’s temptation and eaten the forbidden fruit, she became aware that she was naked, both physically and spiritually. That special tie of intimacy with God was severed, and Eve hid herself in the garden, quaking from God’s presence. “What is this you have done?” is the question God asked Eve when he confronted her (Gen. 3:13).

God was not inquiring as to the details of her action. He already knew what she had done. “What have you done to your special relationship with me? What’s happened to your spiritual state?” That is more likely what his question really meant. Not that he did not know that as well. But Eve needed to be reminded. She needed to recognize the seriousness of her action.

It is a question we all need to ask ourselves in our daily encounters with God. What are we doing? Are we truly reflecting God’s image and caring for his creation? Or have we forgotten the purposes for which we were created? Do we still have a special relationship with God, or have we let our sins and desires come between us and our heavenly Father?



"The serpent deceived me, and I ate," was Eve's reply. She had listened to the serpent's doubt-inducing question—"Did God *really* say. . . ?" We do the same. Despite ourselves, we listen to those questions the world raises about God and the lifestyle he desires of his people. Doubt raises its ugly head, and we find it easy to give in to selfish desires. We fall from intimacy with our creator.

But we have a solution to the problem of sin that Eve could not have imagined. In Christ, we have forgiveness and reconciliation. If we repent, confess our sin, and pray for forgiveness, if we continue walking daily with Jesus, his blood cleanses us from our sins (1 Jn. 1:7, 9; 2:1, 2). What a blessing, and what a wonderful promise from God!

## HAGAR

Hagar, the maid to Abraham's wife Sarah, is another woman from Genesis who confronted God. In fact, she did it twice. The first time was when Hagar became pregnant with Abraham's child. Though Sarah had suggested the union as a means of producing heirs, when it occurred and Hagar felt superior to her mistress, Sarah mistreated her. Hagar fled into the desert.

There God's angel found her. "Where have you come from, and where are you going?" he asked. This, too, is a question which can be taken more than one way.

Hagar answered with the obvious, "I'm running away from my mistress, Sarah." She could just as easily have said, "I came from Egypt to a place in the heritage of God's people, but now I'm trying to escape the responsibility that entails."

We, too, have come from one place and are on our way to another, and we should stop and ask ourselves repeatedly just where we have come from and where we are going. For instance, we came from a particular family environment, and we are creating a new environment on a daily basis. If we came from an abusive family, are we working to create a family of love? If we came from a Christian family, do we find ourselves, like Hagar, running away? And we came from the hand of God

into the heritage of his people. Are we pressing on to the goal of his heavenward call? (Phil. 3:14). Are we moving forward despite our sins, our sorrows, and our disappointments?

The angel sent Hagar back to her mistress and gave her a promise for her son's future. Hagar's response to God's promise is an inspiring lesson to us all. "You are the God who sees me," she said with rare insight. "I have now seen the One who sees me."

This should be our response as well. Many are frightened by the thought that God sees and knows so much about us. Like Eve, they want to hide from God's holy eyes. But Hagar recognized the comfort of a God who sees, and she knew the great blessing of seeing him as well.

We, too, should take comfort in the fact that God knows us so well that he knows how many hairs there are on our heads. And we should seek to make this relationship reciprocal—to know God as well as he knows us. How can we know God? By listening to his Word, by speaking to him in prayer, by meditating on his nature as expressed in the life of Jesus and in the lives of other godly people we know, and by being open to his guidance and allowing his spirit to flourish and produce its fruit of Godlike virtues in our own lives.

Later, after Sarah had a son of her own, Hagar had a second confrontation with God. Again, she was in the desert. Her water had run out, and she had laid her child under a bush to die. "What is the matter, Hagar?" God asked through his angel, and he allowed her to see the future he had planned for her son as well as the water she needed to preserve his life.

When we are at the end of our rope, when our resources seem inadequate for the task, God softly asks us, as he did Hagar, "What is the matter?" We respond with a torrent of problems and pressures and demands, but if we ask him, God will open our eyes to see his plan and his provision for us. Of course we cannot do it on our own, but God's strength makes all things possible for us (Phil. 4:13).



## SARAH

Hagar's mistress, Sarah, had her own confrontation with God when three visitors approached their tent in the heat of the day. Sarah was standing at the entrance to the tent when God said to Abraham, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Sarah laughed. "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' " God asked. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

It was incredible to imagine. Could Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety? The answer was yes. God is able. The next year when the child was born, they named him Isaac, which means he laughs. "God has brought me laughter," Sarah said, "and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me" (Gen. 21:6).

Out of our hopelessness, God brings joy. "We rejoice in our sufferings," Paul says (Rom. 5:3). "Consider it pure joy" when you face trials is James' message (Jas. 1:2). God can turn our frowns upside down. And he can do the same with our expectations, our sorrows, our fears. God is able. If you come out of this class with no other message today, I would like to leave you with this: God is able.

## LOT'S DAUGHTERS

Lot's daughters confronted God just as destruction was about to rain down on the city of Sodom. "Flee for your lives!" he told them (Gen. 19:16, 17).

Unlike God's message to Hagar when he stopped her from fleeing Sarah's wrath, God told these women to run away. Sometimes he tells us the same thing. He may want us to stand firm and fight for our marriages, our communities, the right. But when we are faced with temptation, the only thing to do is run. We are told to flee from sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), to flee from idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14), and to flee from the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10, 11).

Lot's daughters obeyed God's warning and were saved. Their mother did not. Her feet may have been moving forward, but her eyes—and apparently her heart—turned back to the

wicked city. And she turned into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26). That is our risk when we are indecisive and of two minds and do not commit ourselves firmly to God (Jas. 1:8; 4:8).

## REBEKAH

Rebekah encountered God indirectly, in the person of Abraham's servant. Abraham had sent his servant to get a wife for his son Isaac from among his own people. He did not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman, for the Canaanites were notorious idolaters. The servant prayed for the success of his quest and set a test to indicate the ideal wife for his master's son. When Rebekah passed the test, the servant asked her the all-important question, "Whose daughter are you?" Are you the daughter of God-fearing people? Will your family heritage make you a good wife?

When it became apparent that she was, indeed, one of Abraham's relatives, the servant thanked God for leading him to his goal.

How many of us thought to pray for a suitable mate for ourselves or our children? How often do we approach God with the major decisions of our lives? And how often, when that decision is reached, do we submit to God's will as Rebekah did? Her simple words, "I will go" (Gen. 24:58), recall the words of Mary: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said" (Lk. 1:38).

It is a beautiful love story as Isaac goes out into the fields to meditate one evening and sees the caravan approaching. He looks up and sees Rebekah and she sees him. She gets down from her camel and asks the servant who Isaac is. She is interested in him before she even knows that he is her promised husband.

How many tragedies have occurred because we failed to seek God's will in marriage? God's way is always the right way.

Later, Rebekah becomes pregnant with twins. The twins are so active that Rebekah is concerned. But she has learned well from the example of Abraham's servant. Her first thought is to approach God. "Why is this happening to me?" she asks (Gen.



25:22).

Often in the course of pregnancy, childbirth, and the rearing of children, we mothers ask this question. There are a lot of experts with plenty of advice. People will even stop us on the street with it. But we need to seek God's help in prayer and turn to him for answers.

Rebekah, the answer to prayer, is a wonderful example of prayer. But she is also an example of failing to seek God's will at an important turning point in life. When Isaac was old and was ready to give his blessing to his first-born son, Rebekah decided to take things into her own hands. Instead of asking God's advice, she tells her son Jacob, "Listen carefully and do what I tell you," and "Let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say."

It is easy to get ahead of God, to want things done our way in our time frame and not to depend on him to work things out. As the wise man said, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:4-6). Or as Jeremiah points out, "It is not for man [or woman] to direct his [or her] steps" (Jer. 10:23).

## LEAH

Leah is the last woman in Genesis who experienced a significant encounter with God. So far as we know, God never spoke to her, but her relationship with him developed and deepened as she came to understand his purposes in her life. Leah was the unloved wife of Jacob, who was deeply in love with her sister, Rachel. God blessed Leah with four sons, and her reaction to their births demonstrates her spiritual development.

When the first son was born, she named him Reuben and said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now" (Gen. 29:32). Leah recognized God's hand in the birth, but she still wanted things to work out her way. She sought fulfillment in her husband's love.

At the birth of her second son, Simeon, she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too"

(Gen. 29:33). Again, she saw God as the source of her blessings, but she was still looking the wrong place for satisfaction. She saw her son as compensation.

When Levi was born, she said, "Now at least my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons" (Gen. 29:34). She had lowered her sights from love to mere attachment, but she was still looking in the wrong place.

Finally, at the birth of Judah, she exclaims with joy and fulfillment, "This time I will praise the Lord" (Gen. 29:35).

How many women have ruined their lives seeking completion through men and not God? Leah learned, as all of us must, to appreciate human love but to seek perfect love in the only place it can truly be found—in God. We need to go to God with our needs. Only when he has made us complete will we be able to have satisfying relationships with others.

Eve, Hagar, Sarah, Lot's daughters, Rebekah, and Leah are God's women from Genesis who confronted God in the common activities of daily life and bring us important lessons from those confrontations.

Eve shows us the need to examine our relationship with God and to be sure that we are living in his purposes. Hagar speaks of our heritage and our destination. And she reminds us of our need to see the God who sees us. Sarah teaches us to laugh—not from doubt, but from joy that God is able. Lot's daughters teach us to stand firm for those things that we need to impact, but to run away from temptation and sin. Rebekah teaches us to seek God's will and submit to him in our choice of a mate and in the challenges of motherhood. She shows us the danger of relying on ourselves. And, finally, Leah shows us the importance of looking to God for our fulfillment, and of bringing the fulfillment we find in him into our other relationships.

I have enjoyed this visit with you and with these vital and impressive women from the past. I hope you have benefited from their lessons as much as I have.



## MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Emily Young Lemley

We are fascinated by beginnings! We listen carefully as a friend describes her first meeting with her husband, or another tells how she got her first job. We want to know about our own birth—How did we look? How much did we cry?

Beginnings are the business of Genesis. Here we read about the first woman and many other women trying to follow and understand God—trying to “relate.” Edith Deen in her classic, *All the Women of the Bible*, calls these Genesis women “Women of the Dawn.” What can we learn from them that will enhance our desire to have a relationship with God?

Most of these Genesis women were striking out into unknown territory. Eve had no one to tell her how to talk to God; Sarah’s faith in God did not hold on because of a “support group” of older women; Rebekah’s trouble with her pregnancy came when she was far away from her own mother’s advice and support. Because these were the first women to respond to God, they may seem very far away from our technological culture and far away from our current church fellowship. But, not surprisingly, their personal experiences with God have strong ties to our own.

### RELATIONSHIP BASED ON TRUST

These women had a deep sense that they were created beings—especially Eve. She heard no genetic engineering controversies on nightly TV. In fact, she walked nightly with her Creator. She helped care for his creation. She knew him! Surely it was not hard for her to remember the story of the

recent event of her own creation. Oops! It seems that in spite of her closeness to God’s creative act, this woman forgot her thanksgiving, her obedience, and her dependence. She decided that God’s way of life might be too restrictive; maybe he was trying to deny her something good. She chose to take her destiny and ours into her own hands as she bit into the fruit. Today we are tempted to echo her hopes as we try substitutes for obedience: If we do things our way, we hope that we will become more powerful, we hope that we will know more, and we hope that we will at last “be in charge of our own destiny.”

Many of these women in the dawn of time were required to trust God through long periods of waiting. Sarah heard the promise that she would bear a child. She had trusted God when they moved, not knowing where they were going. But this time God was taking too long. Her “biological clock was ticking” and nothing was happening. She decided that she needed to take charge. Maybe God had forgotten his promise, or maybe he was expecting her to use her God-given ingenuity to figure out this problem. She decided to choose Hagar as her surrogate, and this brought her bitterness that she could not have imagined. Sarah’s giving up on God’s working out his promise reminds us that the Genesis women learned the hard way, as we still do, that God does not forget. He worked out Isaac’s arrival in perfect timing. But in spite of her faithlessness in some instances, Sarah was forgiven and is remembered by God and by us today as a woman of faith (Heb. 11:11).

These women, along with Rachel, Rebekah, and Lot’s wife, “should have known” that God created them to live in relationship with him and that he would fulfill his promises. But instead, they were surprisingly like us: feeling sometimes far away from what God is working on, worrying that God has forgotten his promise, and feeling that perhaps in our age, our way is more efficient, more powerful, and certainly more immediate than God’s plan.

### GOD DESIRES RELATIONSHIP

But even in their failures, and in ours, we learn continually



that God patiently desires relationship. Their failures were sins against that desired relationship. As women of the '90s, we know this better than they ever could have because we know Jesus as God in flesh who lived and died and was resurrected long after these women had "gone to be with their fathers."

In Christ we are in relationship with a person who has come to earth in the flesh. He is a face to us. He is not a whirlwind or a mighty voice. He is Jesus. We are able to look at him through the Gospels. We have seen and heard him talk to women. We have seen him care for them, even from the cross. We relate to a God who has come to visit us on earth and who lives in our hearts: "He is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15).

Yet, still we face the daily challenge of relating to a spiritual, invisible LORD. People get to know each other by doing things together. So what does a lively, loving friendship with God take? The answer is painfully simple—time. We say we are too busy. We say we do not have time, and we are right about what is missing from our "could be" relationship with God—TIME. As the women did in the crowd that Jesus fed, we go home to the mundane and forget the potential for relating to the living God. He said to them:

Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life. . . . This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent. . . . I am the bread of life, he who comes to Me shall not hunger (Jn. 6:27, 29, 35).

I got a card from a friend who wanted to prod me to write. The message said, "I haven't heard from you lately. Are we losing touch?" We lose touch with him because we are in such close touch with the things that we can see and feel and touch and hear. Things rather than relationships gobble our time. Things shout to be filed, fixed, cleaned, moved, and stored. The devil tempts us to put our relationships off for the "perfect time" or the "right mood." He does this most of all with our relationship to God. We lose touch with our Creator, our Guide, our true best Friend because our time is given to "things." And the longer we neglect him, the more reluctant we

are to come before the throne. We feel that we must get "things" in order so we will be acceptable. Like Eve eating the only fruit that was forbidden, we take bites of things that are not part of God's plan, and we lose the confidence to walk with him. But the longer we stay away, the lonelier we become. As the psalmist cried, "My heart and my flesh cry out to the living God" (Ps. 84:2).

I am reminded of earthly efforts at friendship which require so much planning these days. Imagine that you have carved out a time to make a friend of a new neighbor. You have gotten a babysitter, planned what to wear, baked a dessert, and you ring her doorbell. She is expecting you—she has spent time to get home from work early and prepare a salad, set the table, and straighten her living room. She invites you in warmly, but as you sit on her couch, she rushes to answer the telephone. When she returns you ask her about her work. But the doorbell rings. You eat your salad alone. She returns and asks you about your family. But, before you can answer, a racket from the backyard calls your friend away again. You serve yourself dessert and wish that you had brought a magazine to read. She returns to finish her salad when the phone rings again. She rushes away to pick up an unexpected relative at the airport. As she drives out the driveway, you wash up the dishes and slip back home. When your husband asks how the visit was, you say, "It wasn't." You have seen her, you have been in her home, and you have eaten at her table—all the things one would think should make a great friendship. But you are still alone. You do not know her, and she does not know you either. There was no connection of persons.

God wants to be with you. As Paul wrote, "God has made you his friends" (Col. 1:22; TEV). Do you want to be with him? If you hesitate, it is only because you do not know him well yet. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). He has offered you his Word—his heart is there. Open it and be available to read and pay attention. To be friends with God we must spend time with him. He offers himself, "Come unto me."



We need not be perfect, but we must be present.

The devil loves to tell me that this is too much trouble, that later in life I will have more time. He will do anything to keep me from God's powerful Word. Getting time ready for God takes maneuvering of schedules. An earlier wake-up time, a Bible left ready by a favorite chair, or even baby-sitting arrangements (we get sitters for less important reasons). Some women go to a breakfast spot where they can sit away from the phone and from the laundry which calls too. Others get in the car or close their office door. They are determined.

Spending daily time on this most significant relationship, whether it is seven minutes or seven hours, will make a difference in us and in the way we look and feel and act. When you determine the time, here are four ideas that will help it to be relational and transforming:

### FOCUS ON JESUS

Focus on Jesus. He is the power that can forgive and transform—other side issues soon bore us and dilute his presence. I appreciate the red-lettered editions of the Bible because the words that stand out are the most important words we ever will read. One woman begins her time with God with a story from one of the Gospels, and then she goes on to another section of the Bible she is studying in depth. What Jesus says changes our way of looking at our intimidating neighbor or our burdened grocery checker.

### FOCUS ON HIS POWER, NOT YOUR OWN

Do not try too hard. This may sound like strange advice, but sometimes women come to God tense with immediate expectations for something life-changing this very minute. Remember Sarah's impatience, and remember God's faithfulness. We are branches soaking up nourishment, not CEO's giving orders. "He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit" (Jn. 15:5). Some days your time with Christ will be more meaningful than others, but the benefit really comes with long-term

ordinary abiding. That is what relationship is all about.

### FOCUS ON GOD'S WORDS CONTINUALLY

Hang on to what you read. "They looked to Him and were radiant" (Ps. 34:5). Do not put down the book and forget the truth, but let it show in your life that day. One young mother posts her verse for the day above the baby changing table and on her dashboard. So she doubles her time with God. If we keep on connecting, we will be radiant inside and out.

### FOCUS ON SPECIFIC ACTIVE RESPONSE

Be changed by what you read. Ask for forgiveness even as you read the Scripture that convicts you. As you read, "Nor sit in the seat of scoffers" (Ps. 1:1), think, "O Lord, I've been enjoying making fun of that woman who probably is doing her very best. I'm sorry." Do not deaden your spirit by putting off confession. In *Time Management for Christian Women*, Young and Silvey expand on this idea, giving Martin Luther's four questions to make your study more practical:

- (1) "What am I grateful for?" What in the text causes me to be thankful?
- (2) "What do I regret?"
- (3) "Whom should I pray for in addition to myself?"
- (4) "What am I to do?" in light of what I have read.<sup>1</sup>

As you read, you will think of many ideas of things you can do. Do at least one of them that very day. You will be surprised how close you feel to God as you obey Him in the small things.

I know of no Christlike women who do not spend daily time in God's words. It is never too late or too early to begin. I always see that open Bible on the green carpet beside the La-Z-Boy when I walk into my mother-in-law's home. Whenever I borrow my mother's brown pocket New Testament, I see new underlining and exclamation points. These women are using the Word every day for answers and strength, and it has made them radiant.



I want to become the woman God had in mind when he designed me. I do not want to try forbidden fruit or work out God's promises on my own terms. But I can do that only by knowing my Maker well. I cannot change into that woman overnight, but by his power, day by day, I will be changed. I will grow to look like him. I can say even now, I know him and he knows me very well.

### Resemblance

Lord, somewhere I read  
That when two people  
Love deeply  
When they live together  
Sharing  
Caring  
Giving  
Forgiving  
Eventually they begin  
To resemble each other.  
Lord, how long will it be  
Before I look like *You*?<sup>2</sup>

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Helen Young and Billie Silvey, *Time Management for Christian Women* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Pyrance Books, 1990), 57.

<sup>2</sup>Ruth Harms Calkin, *Tell Me Again, Lord, I Forget* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1986, 1974c).

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## MY SERVICE TO GOD

Emily Young Lemley

The young students sang, "Make me a servant. Lord, make me like you. . . ." I could not help thinking: "It's harder to do so than it sounds with a sweet melody around it."

Servanthood is what we are called by Christ to do. He did it in washing the disciples' feet and in a thousand other truly helping acts while he was on earth. The service to which we are called is like his; it encompasses our whole life. It is part of our worship—our acknowledgment of who we are—we have been redeemed, and we are empowered by his strength rather than our own.

We think that there are some services and some sufferings that we could not bear, but our consciousness of God makes it possible: "It is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. . . . To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:19, 21). A servant does her master's bidding, no matter what time it is, no matter what the job is, no matter how she feels about it. The giving up of our own selfishness is often the internal pain of service.

This is a hard saying, but it is also a liberating saying. To follow him means we listen only to his direction, not to the other voices that ask us to volunteer, to lead, to cook, to write, to visit. All of these opportunities may be part of his direction. But we have made a choice to follow only his direction. We listen to his life in Scripture, and we ask for wisdom in prayer so that we may keep our single goal in mind: to be like him. Many Christian women today would warn that saying "yes" to



any request or opportunity without prayer is saying "yes" too soon.

Our service to others is an expression of our relationship with God, so time with him is vital to our daily acts of service. As Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 13, we can do mighty acts which look as if they are loving sacrifice; but if they are not filled with the love of God, they are worthless. Any service done on our own may fall into the category of "garbage" that Paul describes in Phil. 3:8. If God's love determines the meaning in our actions, then it stands true that any action done in his love is of great value. He is in the small things, multiplying them as he sees fit, and he is in the great things which are accomplished in love. He is in the helping hand, in the smile, in the soft word, and in the laughs and tears of believers. Whatever they do in Jesus' name echoes throughout eternity.

Our call to service is for every believer, not just the "talented" or the "influential." As we see in Genesis, God uses people who are willing to trust him, no matter their experience or their talents. His call to serve is a double task. The One who knows us best fits us to our service. It is simply a call to act out God's love for others. Edith Schaeffer says often, "To love God with all our hearts is not to use up love, but to increase it continually."

In fact Christ gave us the hope that in our smallest actions which are done in his name, we were doing our service truly to him (Mt. 25:40). When we think for a moment about the "small" everyday kindnesses that we extend or withhold, and think of how Christ values them, we realize that our visions of building impressive ministries, buildings, or networks expose our worldly view of service. We assume since the world gives medals to those who do big things—and sometimes the church does too—that these things are the significant services. But Christ says the opposite.

So how do we do it? How do we serve in the name of Christ and in his love? There are thousands of daily opportunities. But if Jesus multiplies the smallest service, let us look at three service actions that are small but powerful. They are three actions that Jesus continually did on earth, and they are

actions that people in our world desperately need.

## ENCOURAGE!

Giving encouragement. To stand alongside someone and offer your courage when theirs is weak is a great act of love. It is more powerful than a lecture because it speaks to them of God's love for them. Sometimes to give courage means quietly standing by. Often the greater the tragedy the fewer words we are capable of, but we are able to hold a hand, to wipe a tear, to stand by.

In less traumatic situations, we may be able to give courage by a thoughtful compliment. Mark Twain's famous line reminds us that he could "live for a whole month on one good compliment." His quip points to the significance of the kind word. Of course our words need to be sincere, for God always and only deals in truth. But many times compliments are stifled because we are thinking of ourselves rather than truly looking at the person long enough to word a compliment. What is this person you are with doing and what does he/she hope? Gary Smalley and John Trent in *The Blessing* talk about the value of kind words, thoughtful words, even words that make a picture for the person who is "blessed" or complimented to see and to remember. When we realize how significant our words are to our children and our acquaintances, it causes us to invest them with greater thought and prayer. They have a tremendous impact on lives. "Anxious hearts are very heavy, but a word of encouragement works wonders" (Prov. 12:25).

Prayer is one of the greatest encouragements. Jesus wanted the disciples to stand by in the garden. Christians all over the world have joined hands in prayer and after the "Amen" have walked on resolute and joyful. Pray with people to encourage them—over the phone, in the car, before you part. This is a great encouragement. It is a means of bearing "with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). It swallows up any unnecessary advice or criticism in the love and power of God.



### LISTEN!

Listening is such an important service. "I hear you" rather than "Now who's next?" is something we are all hungry for. One servant summed it up: "The road to the heart is through the ear." Often the service of listening is done by accepting interruption gracefully. People who need to talk are unaware that you may have another agenda for your morning. Jesus valued others, and this often meant responding to interruptions. Remember the woman with the issue of blood (Lk. 8:40-56) and the widow of Nain (Lk. 7:11-17). His sensitivity to others' real needs required compassionate listening. He saw what the woman at Simon's house was doing as she wiped his feet with her tears (Lk. 7:36-50). He felt her pain and he gave her what she most needed—forgiveness. He also allowed her to honor him. He listened to her heart, and he rebuked Simon for not even "seeing" her. Listening with our eyes says to a person, "I see you. I hear you. I care."

Reuben Welch in *We Really Do Need Each Other* tells of his father who was loved by so many in the small town near their farm. Welch reports that many people would drive the long distance to their farm, get out of their car, and talk to his father. He remembers that his father said nothing but "Uh-huh" and "Is that so?" The visitor would get back in the car and thank Mr. Welch for solving all of his problems. Listening is a service that people are so hungry for in this age. Loneliness is said to be one of our 1990s "diseases." Our busyness has deprived us of the casual friendships that might turn into true friendships. We are without extended family, and often even our church family is in such a rush of programs that "listening friendships" do not occur.

Listening to one who needs to be heard is a Christlike service. In listening we witness that "He is our peace." There is no answer that does not include him. Listening is a great antidote to the loneliness of our age. It relieves the listener of selfishness and arrogance and helps the one who talks to experience the love of God. Listening binds us together in love.

### FORGIVE!

Forgiving is a difficult and sometimes silent service. C. S. Lewis reminds us that "everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive, . . ." But when we are in daily relationship to Christ, he gives us a view of our relatives, our friends, and our enemies that exposes their true value—they, too, are created-by-God beings. Our ability to forgive comes from our relationship with the great Forgiver. It is a sign that we recognize our own sin, and that we recognize Christ's continual forgiveness of us. As Jesus taught us to pray: "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Lk. 11:4).

Karen Mains calls forgiveness a willingness to "bear the pain" of the wrong that has been done to us. That is what Jesus did. He had enemies. His enemies had no cause to hunt him down and hurt him. He bore the pain of their unjust cruelty, and he bore the pain of sin for all humanity. His forgiveness on the cross is our model for all forgiveness: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). How often do we forgive with difficulty and then months or years later learn that the person who did us so much harm acted in ignorance or out of wretched circumstances which we could not see?

Forgiveness may be a silent service, for the one you forgive may not know that you hold a grudge against him/her. But it is a service that requires prayer and may require continual prayer, since many of our hurts are brought up to us again and again in our memory. My mother-in-law spent her child-rearing years living on an isolated natural gas plant's "company camp." There were ten homes side by side on the lonely New Mexico mesas. Her neighbor was extremely fearful and isolated. This pitiful woman would not allow her child to play with the other children; he had to stay within their fence and not talk. The children figured out a silent game that they played through the fence (children often go around boundaries), but the mother would never speak or act kindly to my mother-in-law. In fact, she acted rudely on several occasions. Of course, my mother-in-law extended kindness over and over, but there was no response. Almost thirty years later, my mother-in-law



learned that this woman and her family became Christians after they moved away from the area. And they credited the forgiving and persistent spirit of their neighbor who unknowingly drew them to Christ. Forgiveness is powerful; it takes action, and it does not give up.

These three service actions are important to all of us in almost every situation. You probably have other gifts, and you may or may not be using them for the Lord now. But using these three service actions may help you discover other areas that God would have you serve in. He fits all of our gifts and opportunities together (Eph. 4:1-4). His love in us attracts people like a magnet attracts loose nails. That is why Paul admonished, "Live a life of love, just as Christ loved. . . ." (Eph. 5:2).

For God to equip us with these serving responses presumes that we are centered on him, his personality, his power, his love. Our service never takes the place of our personal relationship with him. "Anything that dims my vision of Christ or takes away my taste for Bible reading or cramps my prayer life is wrong for me."<sup>1</sup> His yoke is easy, and when we serve under his control the service flows without fear or faintheartedness. He does not ask us to control those whom we encourage or listen to or forgive—but merely to minister, to do our part to give of his love.

Thank God for the opportunity to serve the people we know with his love. As Newman wrote, "We would be out of work if it weren't for problems. We would be out of life if it weren't for challenges. All struggles and victories can be used for our good and others."

Make me a servant.  
Lord, make me like you.  
For you were a servant.  
Make me one too.

Make me a servant.  
Do what you must do,  
To make me a servant.  
Make me like you.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Irene Y. Mattox, *Patterns for Living* (Nashville, Tenn.: Twentieth Century Christian, 1971), 21.



## DEEPENING MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Louine Woodroof

I take a lot for granted when it comes to God and me. Sometimes it scares me that I feel so comfortable in the relationship with him. When I fail to set him apart, I wonder if I am awed quite enough; when I have not spent time with him, I wonder if he is really Lord of my life; when I act in unbecoming ways, I wonder if he is real to me. These thoughts wander through my mind off and on, but they do not put down roots and begin growing because my relationship with the Father is built on his perfection and not on my performance.

Knowing God is all-important and years of walking with the Father have brought me to an easiness with him. It is like that with those you have known for a long time even though there is always more to know. Conversation comes easier, silences are okay, transparency is desirable, embarrassment is less likely, closeness is the norm, chaff is blown away, acceptance is assured, and dependability is counted on. And yet, like any good relationship, it must be nurtured. Let us explore "Deepening My Relationship With God."

We tend to put many faces on spirituality, and we develop a certain mentality toward it. We make judgments about what it means to be a spiritual person, and sometimes these judgments are incorrect. We make judgments based on dress, lifestyle, vocabulary, position, austerity; and while there is merit in each of these, they are not the determining factors in one's spirituality. We can have all these in place in our lives and still lack a deep relationship with God.

We have all been betrayed to one degree or another by those who seemed spiritual because they said and did all the right

things. We have seen it in faithful "church-goers," in preachers entrusted with the gospel, in people who lived simple, frugal lives, in quiet, unobtrusive people, and in those whose lips spoke pious words and were given to fasting. There is virtue in all of this, and we desperately need the kind of relationship that causes us to burst forth in praise, both with our lips and our lives, but we dare not miss the relationship first. Nothing else will do.

Paul addresses this in Colossians 2 when he says that rules imposed by men or self are destined to perish. "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." (All of us have proven this true when we have gone up against temptation without a relationship and failed miserably.) In verse 19 Paul gives the reason these judgments are ineffective: Such a person "has lost connection with the head." We need to see the value in self-discipline and devotion but not be intimidated by thinking these things are synonymous with true spirituality.

Is. 58:5-9 is an intriguing and insightful passage:

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? . . . Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not turn away from your own flesh and blood?

In all our efforts at spirituality, we need to hear the Father when he says sacrifice is not enough (1 Sam. 15:22; Is. 1:11; Ps. 40:6; 51:16, 17; Prov. 21:3; Mt. 9:13; Mk. 12:33). Hearing is not enough (Jas. 1:22). Tithing is not enough (Lk. 11:42). Prayer is not enough (Is. 1:15; Lk. 18:10). Partaking of the Lord's Supper is not enough (1 Cor. 11:20-34). Religion is not enough (Jer. 6:20; 7:9; Lk. 10:30; 11:46). Worship is not enough (Mt.



5:23). Works are not enough (1 Corinthians 13). Baptism is not enough (1 Pet. 3:21).

Are you discouraged? We all get that way, and it is really not a bad place to be occasionally. Perhaps it is at this point we grow the most.

... too often we become discouraged in the Christian life. Often we are bewildered in the Slough of Despond—often on the verge of despair. We do not understand it; we see no remedy; we lose heart utterly. Every worthy resolution, every good attempt, seems to miscarry. Our prayers do not appear to avail anything; the very acts of our worship seem contaminated with insincerity; and our everyday life—what a dismal series of recurring failures! The heart grows weary with continual defeat; we have no spirit of flight, no hope of victory. All this despite our good intentions and our nagging conscience.<sup>1</sup>

Now you are depressed! When our trust is in *doing* instead of *being*, we will be depressed. The prophet Micah a long time ago asked a relevant question for you and me today—one that should help us. “With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?” He too was tempted to trust in his offerings until he thought better of it: “Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

Then he asked a second question: “And what does the Lord require of you?” His answer is very much like the one Jesus gave the Pharisee who came asking, “What is the greatest commandment?” Both answers are so simple and uncomplicated—so refreshing and liberating. Micah’s answer was, “Act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8). Jesus’ answer is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . and the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt. 22:36-39).

Are we listening? Can we understand the relationship that

God wants with us, or have we so complicated everything that our life with him has become a burden we are not able to bear? Personally, I find comfort and relief in this simple admonition—not that it is easy to live out, but it certainly is an uncluttered statement of what the Lord wants. How beautiful!

David struck right at the heart of relationship when he said, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Ps. 42:1).

Can we identify with this yearning? Does this question pursue us as we go about our daily lives? “When can I go and meet with God” and praise and thank him for his great gifts? For the Balm of Gilead who brings healing to our souls, for the light that overcomes the darkness, for Jesus who is our life? Are our eyes “fixed on him,” “beholding” him so that we are being “changed from one degree of glory to another” until the day comes when we, like Paul, can say, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:21)?

I long for the day when we will be set free from the *doing* mentality and let our souls be flooded with the joy of his presence and the amazement of his being. Our little three-year-old granddaughter Sage captured this spirit for us recently when her mother called her and her brother Parker to the front yard to view an exceptionally beautiful sunset. Upon seeing the overwhelming beauty of the moment, her precious, childlike reaction was, “Oh, let’s pray!” We can learn from that, can’t we? We need to fall in love with our great God so that “. . . in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Is it possible that we too, like the Athenians, worship an unknown God?

There is a song that used to be special here at Harding entitled “My God and I,” and it was sort of the school’s theme song. It has become more special to me in the past few years since I have started walking daily. I am very protective of my walking time, and I seldom ask anyone to join me. My husband is the one exception. He and I usually start out together about 6:30 a.m., but since he walks faster than I do, after a few blocks he moves ahead, and I continue on my own until about thirty



minutes later when he rejoins me. So for about thirty minutes

My God and I go in the field together.  
We walk and talk as good friends should and do.  
We clasp our hands; our voices ring with laughter.  
My God and I walk through the meadow's hue.

It is a time of rejuvenation for me for a lot of reasons. There is something about being outside with nature that is life-giving and life-changing. In the work previously cited by James E. Chessor, there is a chapter entitled "Alone With God." In it he says: "There is something in the open country, the unfenced plains, the whispering forest that infuses the spirit and mood in men that is lost in the artificialities of city life."<sup>2</sup>

He mentions some men of the wilderness—Elijah, David, Moses, John the Baptist, and, of course, Jesus. These men were with people, often in crowded places, but they were fed in the wilderness—the "apartness of silent places." He calls nature a "gentle nurse" who ministers to our needs.

For you the God of nature veils the distant horizon with purple softness and calls forth the rose-colored light of the dewy morn. For you he draws the crimson folds over sunset skies. To you he appears in the lightning's flash and in the brightness of the noonday sun. To you he addresses the voice of thunder and the silent thoughts out of the bright-starred blackness of night. For you the bow appears in the gilded cloud, spanning the pathway of the retiring storm with its seven-fold arch of blended colors. For you the winds whisper, the leaves sing, the raindrops fall. All for you; and in awe you stand meek on hallowed ground, face to face with your Creator, though his glory is veiled, his voice is muffled. And it is there that you praise his name in your silent, breathed prayer.<sup>3</sup>

I have this visit with the Father daily. He has become a good friend with whom I am eager to meet and visit, and on those occasions when I miss our appointment, I am the loser. Because it is he who feeds, nurtures, sustains, chastens, and disciplines me. He makes me a better, richer person, and because

of him my soul prospers. You see, "Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One who is leading."<sup>4</sup>

The golden rule of your life and mine is this concentrated keeping of the life open towards God. Let everything else—work, clothes, food, everything on earth—go by the board, saving that one thing. The rush of other things always tends to obscure this concentration on God. We have to maintain ourselves in the place of beholding, keeping the life absolutely spiritual all through. Let other things come and go as they may, let other people criticize as they will, but never allow anything to obscure the life that is hid with Christ in God. Never be hurried out of the relationship of abiding in Him. It is the one thing that is apt to fluctuate, but it ought not to. The severest discipline of a Christian's life is to learn how to "keep beholding . . . the glory of the Lord."<sup>5</sup>

It has been both a challenge and a blessing for me to prepare this lesson, for I know of no more vital subject for ourselves, our families, the church, or the world. Because this relationship above all others is the key to life itself, it is imperative that we embrace and cherish it with our whole being.

Our Father, We praise you for being so approachable and eager for us to come to you. Work in us through your Spirit that we may come to you in fullness and drink deeply of the comfort and strength that comes only from you. Sustain us in our life's walk, and may we, with the gentleness and care learned from Jesus, bless the lives of others with the realization that you alone are God.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>James E. Chessor, *The Health of the Soul* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Christian Leader Corporation, 1928), 58, 59.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 143, 144.

<sup>4</sup>Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1963), 79.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.



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## "ISRAEL IS MY FIRST-BORN": THE DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY IN GENESIS

Janet M. Fortner

We are surrounded with families in trouble. There are parent troubles: abusive parents, deserting and unsupporting fathers, unfaithful wives, alcoholics. There are children troubles: rebellious teen-agers, kids on dope, abused children, "crack babies," pregnant teens, children who cannot read, and on and on. Much of the time, we just do not understand what is going on around us. We are surprised, then dismayed, and finally crushed by the disturbing, even evil, actions of those we know and love. Dysfunctional families—we know what they are. They are the ones that break our hearts.

Those of us for whom our families and children are vitally and eternally important plague ourselves with questions: "Why do our children and families seem so much worse than in the past? What are we doing wrong?" We often experience a great sense of failure and feel left out of God's plans. We become convinced that God can no longer use our troubled families for his purposes and his glory.

American Christians get a "double whammy" in this regard and experience not only a sense of spiritual failure but of cultural failure as well. This is because our culture and our history have conditioned us to expect that life should get better and better. Over the years of the American experience, we have come to expect things of life and of our families that they can never provide. The violation of these inflated expectations leaves us feeling betrayed, discouraged, bewildered, and helpless. How is it that we find ourselves in this situation?



## THE NOTION OF PROGRESS IN AMERICAN CULTURE

The notion of progress has old and deep roots in the American tradition. Thomas Jefferson, the primary architect of the early American political tradition, believed that "no definite limits could be assigned to the improvability of the human race." George Washington wrote to no less a figure than Lafayette telling him that he (Washington) cherished the "fond, perhaps an enthusiastic idea, that as the world is much less barbarous than it has been," its betterment must "be progressive." Dr. Benjamin Rush, an early American doctor and pioneer in diseases of the mind, fairly gushed over the potential of Man who could "raise (himself) to a resemblance of angels—nay, more, to the likeness of God himself." Men and their circumstances were improving so much and so steadily that Benjamin Franklin wished that he could have been born "two or three centuries hence."

These men, America's Founding Fathers, were products of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Consequently, they believed firmly in Reason. Reason applied to any area of life—politics, science, agriculture, or even religion—could only lead to improvement. America was a pristine and vibrant place where the sins and failures of old and decaying Europe need not be repeated. America came to believe that this improvement would be progressive, continuing, and effectively without limits. It was this optimism applied to politics and political theory which gave us the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution. Jefferson expressed his optimism based upon Reason when he stressed in the Declaration that all people have certain rights which cannot be taken from them, "unalienable rights." And those rights are "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Government, in fact, found its purpose, he said, in guaranteeing the "Safety and Happiness" of its citizens.

James Madison expressed similarly optimistic sentiments in the Preamble to the Constitution. Here he stated that the purpose of the document was to form a "more perfect union, . . . insure domestic Tranquility, . . . [and] promote the general

Welfare" (emphasis mine). For Madison, as for Jefferson, the very purpose of government lay in seeing that its citizens could expect to live out their lives in happiness, tranquillity, and general welfare. Our current expectations that our lives, homes, and families should get better, and perhaps reach a time without problems, have roots right here with the founding of the country.

## THE AMERICAN SENSE OF PRIDE

Closely associated with the notion of progress was that of success. Because our situation was getting better and better, Americans felt they had every right to expect success. All that was required was a little hard work on the part of the individual. Anyone could pull himself up by his bootstraps, and anyone who did not was a failure.

There was Andy Jackson to prove that we were right. The Age of Jackson was the Romantic Period in America, the early nineteenth century. Jacksonian America gave us the "self-made man." This man, like the frontiersman Jackson, started with little or nothing—no education, no money, no influence—and "made something of himself." If America was the land of almost unlimited freedom and opportunity, the American was an individual who could perfect himself. He seemed to be able to accomplish anything, and he took great pride in his ability to build, to make, to achieve, and to make his life and his country better and better.

This optimism about the ultimate perfectibility of mankind and his earthly circumstance continued in the nineteenth century. Various reform movements developed during the first half of the century which aimed at realizing early hopes for heaven on earth. Utopian communities tinkered with society's institutions, toying with notions like open marriage and communal living and ownership of property. Efforts were made to improve schools, prisons, and insane asylums. Abolitionists sought to rid America of slavery; and women agitated for the vote, teaching that America's saintly women voters could purge politics and government of all its evils.



The Progressive Movement around the turn of the century struggled to change American political institutions, to clean up cities, improve education, and generally make American life better for the common man. Technology, a developing force since the last half of the nineteenth century, lent a hand in improving life. The science of medicine began to make headway against poor nutrition, childhood illnesses, and, with the advent of penicillin, against disease directly. Surely, we Americans had reason to hope for a perfectible world in which mankind became better and better.

### THE FAILURE OF PROGRESS AND PRIDE

Still, when we Americans were honest, there has seemed to us that American life also had a "down" side. Our striving after "life, liberty and happiness" seemed to cause as many problems as it solved. American optimism got a "black eye" in the Civil War, a "left hook to the chin" in World War I, and a "right to the midriff" in the Depression. Yet, after World War II, America seemed to be at her peak—geared up to maximum capacity, ready to produce every conceivable luxury and pleasure. Our hard work, our faith in the American Dream, and our pride seemed about to pay off. And Americans were ready! Now, at last, perhaps, the Good Life was at hand!

But, instead, the post-World War II years have been our period of greatest disillusionment. Somehow, just as we thought we were getting a handle on the American Dream, it began to turn to ashes in our hands. A godless Communist philosophy was threatening much of the world. Our foreign policy was failing in the Far East, but our economic policies were succeeding so well in Japan and Western Europe that they were to become our chief competitors. Our jobs were threatened; divorce and crime rates soared. Our children took to the streets in protest against our way of life. New specters of little-understood "gender-identity confusion," brutal child abuse, teen-age pregnancy, devastating drug use, and deathly AIDS rose up eerily, mystifying and terrifying us.

As Christians, we ask ourselves, "What has failed?" Is it we

ourselves? The American Dream? Our God? Perhaps part of the answer to our questions is that we are making some assumptions which God never meant for us to make. Maybe we are confusing the temporal expectations of our American life with the eternal Hope of our life in Christ. It could also be that part of our failure comes from requiring of ourselves, our lives, and our families that they conform more to the American Dream than with God's Ideal.

Even our views of what the "biblical family" was like may not be entirely correct. Another look at that family at its beginnings may give us more realistic and godly expectations and may show us where our American pride has caused us to run amok.

### THE FAMILY IN GENESIS

#### *The Family of Adam and Eve*

The beginnings of the family in Genesis are most revealing. The "first family" has been repeatedly and extensively studied. Yet, some of its most enlightening aspects are frequently overlooked. The families which God employs for his plans for redeeming man are almost without exception families which experienced serious problems within their own culture. They are certainly not the model families which we would choose if we were in charge of these eternal plans. For they were very often dysfunctional families.

If, for instance, there was a perfect marriage between Adam and Eve in the paradisaical Garden, there was no perfect family with children there. Their children were born to them only *after* they had sinned and had been expelled from the Garden. This means that when the first family was constituted on earth, its children were born into a world and a home which had *already* experienced sin and its terrible consequences.

By the time of the birth of Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve had already known pride so great that it led them to seek equality with God. They had already engaged in deception, lying, lust, shame, blaming, and fear. Somehow it surprises us that jealousy and "sibling rivalry" led quickly to murder. Why should



it? These boys were born into what was already a dysfunctional family!

### *Abraham's Family*

When the time came for God to single out a people for his own, he chose Abram and Sarai as the genesis of this line. If we or the patriarchs themselves had been directing this show, we would have done things "properly" as our culture directed. Certainly, we would have seen to it that the lineage was correct, that inheritances went to those to whom they were due, that blessings were received by those our culture directed should properly receive them—in a word, in a manner which would be easily recognized by one and all as culturally acceptable.

Naturally, when the Lord God began to reveal himself and his plans to Abram, slowly at first, Abram understood only dimly, hindered by his cultural expectations. We, of course, understand what God had in mind. From our perspective, it all seems so clear. But God's entire plan for Abram's family was *not* always fully clear to Abram. Consequently, heartbreak and the seeds of sin sown in despair were in Abram and Sarai. For they were old and, in a culture which highly prized children, they were childless. And God's plan must have seemed very vague and uncertain.

When the Lord called Abram to leave his country, in Genesis 12, he first alludes to his plan for him. But regarding a child or children, God was not specific at that time. Among other promises, God promised to make Abram a great nation, to bless him and make his name great, and to bless all peoples of the earth through him. Certainly, if God would make Abram a great nation, Abram had to know at this time that an heir of some kind would be essential. God even expanded this promise in Gen. 13:14ff., when he promised to make Abram's "offspring like the dust of the earth."

But the years were passing and when God next spoke to Abram in a vision (Gen. 15:1ff.), it is apparent that Abram had been mulling the problem over. "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" (Gen. 15:2). Abram seemed to be saying, "I've been thinking this thing over. I am

old; Sarai is old. Since you will make me a great nation and an heir is necessary, how about Eliezer?" God, however, had other ideas: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from *your own body* will be your heir." And Abram was able to believe God, and it was credited to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:4, 6).

But there was as yet no mention in the promises about this son of Abram's body that Sarai would be the child's mother, and Sarai, in despair, took matters into her own hands. Sarai told Abram to take her maidservant, Hagar, in hopes that "perhaps I can build a family through her" (Gen. 16:1ff.). Since she could not have children, Hagar was the next best thing; and, according to custom, Hagar's children would have been considered Sarai's.

It did not work out well however. Hagar's attitude was bad, and Sarai never seemed to take the child and love him as her own. But Ishmael was Abram's first-born son. And Abram must have thought, "Ah, finally, God is keeping his promises. For now I have a son who came from my own body." Abram would have considered that the promises God had made (in Genesis 15) were fulfilled.

The years kept passing; Abram was now ninety-nine years old. Ishmael was growing up, if resented by Sarai, certainly loved by Abram. But God was about to make his plan somewhat clearer. God appeared to Abram to "confirm the covenant" he had made (Genesis 17). Here God renewed all his promises to Abram. And after he had changed his name to Abraham (father of many), he instituted the covenant of circumcision with all the males of Abraham's household. Now, God complicated things for Abraham. God changed Sarai's name to Sarah and promised that he would "bless her and surely give you a son by her." Barren, old Sarah would be the "mother of nations"! God was communicating to Abraham that he was bringing Sarah into the covenant plan and relationship as well. But Abraham found this difficult to accept on at least two grounds. "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing," he remonstrated. "Sarah and I are old!" he seemed to be saying. "Oh, and, God, don't forget. I already have a first-



born son, who is my rightful heir, who should receive the blessings of the first-born, and upon whom I should build my house."

God further clarified things for Abraham: "Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant." As for Ishmael, God also made promises: "I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. . . . I will make him a great nation." "But," God went on to say, "my covenant I will establish with Isaac" (Gen. 17:17ff.).

This seems clear enough to us! But we know the rest of the story. It was not yet clear to Abraham that God intended that Ishmael should be divested of his first-born rights, the inheritance and the blessing, and that a second-born son should usurp them! It was not the natural and culturally proper thing to do, and it would not have come easily to Abraham's mind. After all, making great nations of both Ishmael and Isaac would surely fulfill the first promises God had made to Abraham to make him a great nation (Genesis 12; 13; 15). And, so far as Abraham knew, God's covenant could be established with Isaac without disinheriting first-born Ishmael in any way.

Within a few years after Isaac's birth, however, the drama reached its climax. Finally, Abraham had to admit that his entirely proper, culturally-conditioned expectations for his family were not God's plans. God was doing something not just for Abraham and his family but for the entire world, and God's plans were flawless. Had Abraham realized what God's plan for the two boys was, he would not have reacted as he did to Sarah's demand that Ishmael be sent away (Gen. 21:1ff.).

When Isaac was weaned, Sarah, who had never been happy with the attitude of Hagar and Ishmael, demanded of Abraham: "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." Sarah saw Ishmael as a threat to her own first-born; but once Hagar had become the mother of Abraham's son, Sarah did not have the right, according to ancient Near Eastern culture and customs, to cast her out. It had been, after all, Sarah's idea to give Hagar to Abraham.

As for Abraham, "the matter greatly distressed Abraham because it concerned his son [Ishmael]" (Gen. 21:11). For "that slave woman's son" was Abraham's first-born son! This was not how Abraham had envisioned the future! This was not how things were supposed to be done! It was just unacceptable and wrong to cast out one's first-born son and his mother even if she were a slave!

But God, seeing Abraham's distress and heartache, came to him in explanation. "Do not be distressed about the boy and the maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned": that is, Isaac shall have the first-born's blessing and inheritance; he shall be your first-born instead of Ishmael!

By the standards of what was right within his own culture, Abraham's family was not behaving properly. Sarah at first engaged in a culturally acceptable behavior—giving her handmaiden to Abraham in order to have children thereby, but later she was unwilling to live with the consequences of her own actions. She then demanded that Abraham unlawfully cure the problem of her own making by getting rid of Hagar and Ishmael.

This placed Abraham in the terrible no-win situation of having to displease Sarah, his lawful wife, and risk threat (possibly even physical) to her child, his second son, by allowing Ishmael to stay or of having to send away improperly his first-born son and rightful heir and the child's slave-mother. Like Adam and Eve's family, Abraham's was, within its own time, a dysfunctional family.

#### *Other Dysfunctional Families in Genesis*

Abraham's family was not the last dysfunctional family which God would use in the story of man's salvation. In fact, Genesis seems to fairly shimmer with the message that God's ways are not man's ways and that, more often than not, those ways run entirely counter to what is acceptable and proper in any given age.

In the family of Isaac and Rebekah, again, it was not the first-born who was the chosen child, who received the blessing and the prominent place in Salvation History (Genesis 24—



27). Within this family the parents expressed favoritism between their children; deceit, lying, and treachery existed between the sons. The first-born son, sign of his father's strength and the recipient of special blessing and a greater portion, despised his first-born rights and sold them to his younger brother for a bowl of beans. The second-born, Jacob, the usurper, was above very little in getting what he and his mother wanted. Certainly, within its own time and culture, this was another dysfunctional family.

Could anything better be expected of Jacob's family? It began poorly when Jacob was given a wife (Leah), whom he did not love, instead of Rachel, whom he ardently desired. This unwholesome situation created a dark backdrop against which the lives of their children were played out.

Jacob's first-born son, Reuben, slept with his father's concubine and reaped his father's displeasure (Gen. 35:22; 49:4). One of the younger sons, Joseph, Rachel's first child and Jacob's well-beloved, was arrogant towards his brothers and his parents. As a result, he sowed the enmity with his brothers, among whom a murderous jealousy simmered. It was neither Jacob's first-born, Reuben, nor his favorite, Joseph, whom God chose for his purposes in Salvation History. It was Judah who would establish the lineage of great kings and become the ancestor of the coming Christ. Judah, fourth child of an unloved mother in a dysfunctional family!

Even among Judah's children, the first-born would again be passed over (Genesis 38). Er, his first-born, and Onan, the second-born, were wicked and God slew them. It was Perez, Judah's own child by Er's wife, Tamar, and Tamar herself, whom we find in the lineage of Christ. And it was Perez's first-born, the unknown Hezron, who was the first "first-born son" among all these patriarchs, to find a place in Jesus' lineage (Gen. 46:12; Mt. 1:3).

#### *God's Purposes for the Dysfunctional Family in Genesis*

What is it that God is doing here in Genesis which he wanted the Israelites to see and which he wants us to understand? Why does it matter that God systematically rejected the "normal" and "culturally proper and acceptable" among patriarch fami-

lies? Why would God repeatedly arrange matters so that he was selecting a culturally "second-class" child to serve his purposes?

The Almighty One was not long in explaining his reasons for rejecting the first-born sons of the patriarchs. He was moving to create, to beget, *his own first-born*: "This is what the Lord says, Israel is my first-born" (Ex. 4:22). Throughout the Old Testament the theme of the nation of Israel, God's Son, his first-born, is repeated, "I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my first-born son" (Jer. 31:9). (Ephraim, whose name became synonymous with Israel's, was Joseph's younger son, chosen by Jacob/Israel over Manasseh, the first-born!) "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos. 11:1).

#### *The Nation of Israel as First-born*

God's first-born, Israel, was chosen by him for a special place in Salvation History! Surely Israel would be different from the earlier first-born of patriarch families! Surely this first-born would be faithful and true, eagerly seeking to do his father's will and to be worthy of the first-born blessing and the land which he inherited!

On the contrary, the entire Old Testament represents the saga of a father seeking his erring child—always going astray, always rebellious, always turning to other fathers (false gods), and forgetting from whence he came.

The very first-born whom God carefully chose for himself to be a "covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles" (Is. 42:6) was a first-born who failed to live up to his name and his blessings. The "family" of Israel which God called out to "bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Is. 49:6) was a dysfunctional family!

### **GOD'S PURPOSES FOR DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES**

#### *God Chooses Despised Things*

In Genesis, we have seen that God rejected the normal and natural course of human events and human culture in favor of a supernatural path. God rejected the first-born of men that he



might create and choose for himself his own first-born, the nation of Israel.

The meaning is unmistakable: God has deliberately chosen the culturally rejected as his instrument. For God's power is not made perfect in man's strength but in man's weakness! "God [chooses] the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He [chooses] the lowly things of this world and the despised things—the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, *so that no one may boast before him*" (1 Cor. 1:27, 28; emphasis mine). And one of those lowly things which nullify things that are was Jesus, the First-born who did *not* fail his Father's purposes. *Jesus!*—First-born of Mary, First-born from the Dead (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5), Only Begotten of God, First-born of God (Heb. 1:6)—come to rescue God's other first-born, Israel!

Few of us come of such humble beginnings as this First-born, Jesus of Nazareth. He was conceived before his parents were married, born in shame, but accepted by his "stepfather," lived in poverty with little hope of bettering himself, an itinerant preacher supported through the gifts of others. He died a criminal's death, despised by the people of his home town and his nation. It would seem that Jesus himself came from a dysfunctional family! It was not at all of the nice middle-class type which we treasure in America as the epitome of all that is good and proper!

We Americans come of a tradition which is proud of its accomplishments: its history, political institutions, pioneer experience, technology, and "good old American know-how." For us, the sky has always been the limit. Success and progress have come easily to us in our New World so full of resources. We like to think we did it all ourselves. As Americans we believe in the self: the importance of the individual, "self-help," the "sense of self," self-confidence, the "self-made man," and self-sufficiency. As a people, we are not high on dependence upon others, humility, or recognizing our own weaknesses and limitations.

While qualities such as these may have stood us in good stead politically and economically, in warfare, technology, and

foreign policy, they are not qualities which God necessarily prizes. These characteristics are frequently the very ones which he condemns most in his people, Israel. (See most any of the prophets!) They are most assuredly *not* the qualities which Jesus possessed or which he seeks in his people.

#### *Lessons We Can Learn From Families in Genesis*

What lessons can we Americans learn from families in Genesis and even from Jesus' own family that can help us with our dysfunctional families? First, God in his eternal wisdom deliberately chose families with problems in which to work out his will. He did not cause their sins or encourage them in their sins, but he was able to work his gracious will in spite of their sins and often even *through* their sins.

Second, God is sovereign over all time and all men, over America, over each of us, and over our families. God sometimes works his will with our help; but we must all say that most of the time he works his will in spite of us, much like the patriarch families of old.

Third, if we are judging our families by the standard of twentieth-century America, we are making a dreadful mistake. And, if we are using American views of middle-class material success, power, and the belief that things will get "better and better," as a measure, we are also making an eternal mistake. The families of Genesis teach us that God's purposes most often run counter to the standards of any given culture because God is not concerned that we live in such a way that we can take the credit for our success or our goodness (or our children's!). We must give up all aspirations to success on the world's terms because the way of this world is *not* to carry a cross toward one's death, which is exactly what Jesus requires: "Anyone who does not carry his cross . . . cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:27).

Fourth, God requires (as he did of families in Genesis) that we live lives of complete dependence upon him, that we judge success or failure entirely in terms of his purposes, and that we give up all pretense of living before him as proud, self-sufficient, self-help, "know-it-all" Americans.

Fifth, we can see from Genesis that God can work his will in



and through even dysfunctional families. We can be encouraged to know that, while our families are not better than the ones in Genesis, they are certainly not worse. This does not excuse our failures. It does not mean that we, or our families, can "sin the more that grace may abound." It does mean that we can and must come to terms with the fact that *all* families (including our own), since the first children were born to sinful Adam and Eve, have had to cope with sin in the lives of family members (fathers, mothers, and children).

Finally, we must realize that our families will not (despite medicine, psychology, technology, and cable television) become "better and better." There is no perfection, no heaven, no never-never land in *this* world. Hence, we must not be surprised at their, or our, sinfulness. And we must not look on the sinfulness of our families as an inconvenience which must at all costs be remedied as quickly as possible so that we can restore our "neat and tidy" lives. Sin abides. Jesus is its only cure. Our families will remain sinful families in need of redeeming by God's great First-born, Jesus. Our task, our purpose, is to be the eyes, ears, and hands of Jesus here on earth, serving the needy. Many of those needy are right in our own families.

## CONCLUSION

In the midst of the heartbreak which dysfunctional families often bring to us, there is also much comfort for *us* in Jesus. We can know that we can have peace and hope where our families are concerned. This is not the peace or the hope which comes of seeking a better material world. It is not the "peacefulness" and contentment that comes of having everything go well with us and our families. It is the peace which comes of recognizing our own *helplessness*, of no longer trying to operate from a "power position" with regard to others in our family and especially with regard to God. We can cast ourselves and our families humbly before him, whether our children are newborns or middle-aged, confessing that we know very little and can do even less. We can have the happiness which comes of placing ourselves and our lives at the disposal of Christ to be used in

service to our troubled family members. We will have the hope that comes of knowing that *he* will be our ever-present Help, our Shield, our Defender. *He* will help us to carry our load. He will not leave us as orphans in the world!

We will have the contentment which comes of seeing our families with their problems in a new light. We will not see them as an inconvenience to be carefully avoided or a burden merely to be endured. They will become for us opportunities for loving and lasting service to God. We will see them as a place where the grace of God is needed, where the power of God can operate, and where the glory of God will be seen.

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## ABRAHAM'S OTHER CHILDREN— MUSLIMS

Everitt W. Huffard

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# OTHER SUBJECTS

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In many Arab communities, hospitality symbolizes a value that is honored through overt displays of generosity. In such a culture, any disagreement between a host and a guest will not be resolved by the guest's politics and opinions, but only by the host's. Both are directly related to

the culture of the region. America is much different than Jerusalem or Cairo in at least six ways. First, we are not Jews; they have already lost family and friends, and we rely on only one source of information about the Jews' history, while they have personally witnessed life-changing events, have family and friends who have witnessed such events, studied these matters at school, and listened to many from several sources. Third, we are relatively ignorant about history, geography, and ethnicity. They have a deep knowledge of the international community to which they belong. Considerers of our high school in Galilee, Israel, speak English, Turkish, and Hebrew fluently. Fourth, we are frequently not able to appreciate their loyalty as Jews or as Arabs to various family and geopolitical groups. Fifth, we do not understand their identity, and they have no choice. Sixth, we are not historically opinionated, very marginal, to major life events. For nearly all Middle Easterners, it is a central part of their life in most spheres of life. An example of this difference is shown in a discussion between an American Jew and an Arab Muslim about Abraham.



## ABRAHAM'S OTHER CHILDREN— MUSLIMS

Evertt W. Huffard

For most Arab communities, hospitality symbolizes a value system in which the host seeks to maintain honor through overt generosity. One ruler of such a system forbids any disagreement with the guest. Likewise, an honorable guest will not press to discuss controversial issues, especially politics and religion. But once you cease to be a guest, the dialogue on these two topics is intense and endless. Both are directly related to any interaction between Christians and Muslims.

Our discussion of the topic in America is much different than the discussion of it in Jerusalem or Cairo in at least six ways. First, we have little to lose; they have already lost family and lands. Second, we often rely on only one source of information (the U.S. news media) while they have personally witnessed life-changing events, have family and friends who have witnessed such events, studied these matters at school, and listened to news from several sources. Third, we are relatively apathetic toward history, geography, and ethnicity. They have a greater awareness of the international community to which they belong. Graduates of our high school in Galilee, Israel, speak Arabic, English, and Hebrew fluently. Fourth, we are individualists and cannot appreciate their loyalty, as Jews or Arabs, to extended family and geopolitical groups. Fifth, we choose our religious identity, and they have no choice. Sixth, religion has become optional, even marginal, to major life events in our society, but for nearly all Middle Easterners, it is an ever-present reality in most spheres of life. An example of these differences surfaces in a discussion between an American Christian and an Arab Muslim about Abraham.



## CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM

Jews, Christians, and Muslims make claims to the same spiritual heritage as "children of Abraham." Although the Bible has much to say about this, we can too easily edit it out as culturally irrelevant. The Jews were very serious about their ancestry. Jesus chided a Jewish audience that could not see God as their Father because Abraham was their father (Jn. 8:39). However, Paul taught that anyone baptized into Christ became a child of God through faith and a child of Abraham, "heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:26-29).

Muslims identify with Abraham like Jews did in the first century. Every Friday noon prayer in the Muslim world has a special Abrahamic prayer:

O Allah, bless our master Muhammad and the family of our master Muhammad as you blessed our master Abraham and the family of Abraham, and give your blessing upon our master Muhammad and the family of Muhammad as you gave your blessing to Abraham and to the family of Abraham in all the worlds, for you are most praised and most wonderful.

Although Abraham was blessed with a big family, relationships between his children have been characterized by centuries of animosity. Jews remember years of Muslim hostility and blame Christians for the anti-Semitism that led to the holocaust. Christians were persecuted by Jews and Romans in the first few centuries of their history, but neither were able to inflict the damage on the Christian world to the degree that Islam did. By the ninth century, whole churches vanished in the Middle East. In North Africa, 6.5 million Christians converted to Islam and 1 million Christians in Persia within two centuries.

Muslims, however, remember two centuries of war against the Crusaders. More recently, they have witnessed the eviction of several million Palestinians from their lands by the Jews, with the support of the "Christian" West. They cannot understand why Christian fundamentalists support the State of Israel as if the Zionists are exempt from international law and

justice.

As each religious group assumes a national identity, cultural and ethnic loyalties render conversion something close to an act of treason. Some Jews and Muslims are convinced that they cannot maintain their Jewish or Arab heritage if they become Christians. Even the terms "Christian," "conversion," or "missionary" have become offensive to these communities. Their governments have laws against conversion. Churches are not even allowed to exist in Saudi Arabia. Freedom of religious expression is unknown in Muslim countries and in Israel. So what is our response to these seemingly insurmountable obstacles?

I do not have time to unravel centuries of hostility, but I could at least point you in a new direction and give a renewed sense of hope for our witness to Jesus as the Christ.

## ISHMAEL, ISLAM, AND THE ARABS

Because the genealogy of Jesus points to Isaac's side of Abraham's family, we have given little thought to his other children. But what about the other side of the family tree? Did Abraham's other children believe in God? Can Muslims rightfully claim ancestry in Abraham through Ishmael?

The Qur'an identifies Ishmael (Isma'il) as a prophet who was inspired of God (cf. Surah 4:163), known for his faithfulness to his promise (Surah 19:54, 55), and his patience (Surah 21:85).

Islamic tradition embellishes these few Qur'anic references with apocryphal stories that certainly convince the outsiders that Islam has a strong emotional bond to Abraham and Ishmael. Many of these are included in the footnotes of Yusuf Ali's translations of the Qur'an. Because Ishmael is left out of most references to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Surah 6:84; 12:6, 38; 19:49; 21:72; 29:27; 37:112, 3; 38:45), Ali often has a note to remind the reader of Ishmael. To explain Abraham's praise to God for Ishmael and Isaac (Surah 14:39), he adds the significance of the role of the elder brother.

... the younger son's progeny developed the Faith of Israel and that of Christ; the elder son's progeny perfected



the more universal Faith of Islam, the Faith of Abraham the True.<sup>1</sup>

It is believed that Ishmael (rather than Isaac) volunteered for the sacrifice that Abraham offered to God. Ishmael's virtue of patience becomes exemplary for Muslims because he waited for a ram to be substituted for the sacrifice. The focus of Abraham's faith is thus shifted to Ishmael as the "sacrifice of God."<sup>2</sup> Ishmael and Abraham built the Ka'aba, purifying it as the house of Allah and center of worship for all the world.<sup>3</sup> Some traditions even go so far as to claim that Abraham divorced Sarah, went with Hagar to Mecca where they died and were buried.<sup>4</sup>

Tubarsi, a Muslim commentator, tells a story of Abraham visiting Ishmael, after receiving Sarah's permission to do so. Ishmael was hunting, and his wife was unable to show any hospitality to Abraham. When Ishmael returned and heard what happened, he divorced his wife and married another.<sup>5</sup>

Historical records, the Bible, and the Qur'an cannot verify the tradition that links Muhammad's clan to Ishmael. That does not rule it out. We simply lack adequate evidence. There are, however, several motives for Islamic identification with Ishmael and Abraham.

First, pride in ancestry and purity of lineage is of supreme value in Semitic societies. And, more importantly, the older the genealogical tradition the greater the honor.<sup>6</sup> Paul challenged Jewish "confidence in the flesh," even though he had a right to make the same claim as a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:2-6).

Second, when Muhammad fled from Mecca in A.D. 622, he was invited to Medina (Yathrib) to provide leadership for a troubled city. Jews and Christians lived among the pagan Arabs. Muhammad anticipated a warm reception from the Jewish and Christian communities in the city, due to his monotheistic teachings. But the Jews were critical of Muhammad and his claim to prophethood. They also had political ambitions in supporting Abd Allah b Ubayy to govern the city instead of Muhammad. Identification with Abraham, through Ishmael, may have been an attempt to win their favor and

support.<sup>7</sup>

Third, the tension between northern and southern tribes in Arabia challenged any attempts to unity. A popular Arab myth attributed the problem to a dual descent. The southern tribes came from Qahtan and the northern tribes from Adnan. Then southern tribes claimed superiority because Qahtan was seven generations closer to Noah than Adnan, the son of Ishmael.<sup>8</sup> Still other traditions claimed that Qahtan was the son of Ishmael.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the case, the tracing of their ancestry to Ishmael and Abraham provided a convincing solution to tribal clashes within Arabia.

Fourth, after the Muslim victory over the Crusaders in the twelfth century A.D., the West found some comfort in identifying the Muslims with Ishmael. Some concluded that the Muslim victory was the fulfillment of prophecy because they, like Ishmael, would "be a wild ass," with their "hand against everyone," and everyone's hand against them (Gen. 16:12).

## THE ARABS

The Bible refers to tent-dwellers in the East as "People of the East" (Gen. 29:1; Is. 11:14; Jer. 49:28; Ezek. 25:4, 10; Job 1:3). These nomads lived in the deserts of northern Sinai, northern Arabia, and Syria. They moved often to feed their flocks of camels and sheep.

The first historical reference to the Arabs dates to 850 B.C. in Babylonian and Assyrian records. The oldest reference occurs in an Assyrian inscription about Gindibu the Arab who, with one thousand camel troops, joined forces with Benhadad II of Damascus against Shalmaneser III in the Battle of Qarqar.<sup>10</sup>

An inscription from Tiglath-Pileser III at Nimrud referred to Zabibe and Samsi as "queens of Arabia."<sup>11</sup> The fragment of an alabaster slab preserved the story of Sennacherib's campaign against the Arabs in 691 B.C. Fifty years later, on the walls of the Ishtar Temple in Nineveh, Assurbanipal recorded his conflicts with the Arabs.

Eph'al searched for biblical and historical links between Ishmael and the Arabs, but found none. He did observe a



change in biblical references to the nomads about the tenth century B.C. Before the monarchy of Israel, these nomads were Hagarites (1 Chron. 5:10, 19, 20; 27:31), Ishmaelites (Gen. 37:25; 39:1; 1 Chron. 2:17; 27:30), Midianites (Gen. 36:35; 37:28, 36; Ex. 2:15, 16; 3:1), and Amalekites (Gen. 14:7; Ex. 17:8-16; Num. 13:29; 14:25; Deut. 25:17-19; Judg. 3:13; 5:14; 1 Sam. 14:48). The Ishmaelites were not mentioned in the Bible or historical sources after the tenth century B.C.<sup>12</sup>

About this time, several references to the "Arabs" began to appear (2 Chron. 17:11; 21:16; 22:1; 26:7; Is. 13:20; 21:13; Jer. 25:24; Ezek. 27:21). Jeremiah used an apparently well understood simile of his day: "Like an Arab in the desert" (Jer. 3:2). Whether "Arab" referred to a specific ethnic or tribal group, we do not know.<sup>13</sup> "Arabia" was a Greek innovation for the land. The only evidence, and very tenuous at that, of a link would be ethnogeographical since these Arabs (nomads) lived in the same area where Ishmael and Esau would have settled.

### PROMISE TO ISHMAEL

Ishmael is referred to only once in the New Testament. Paul compares the sons of Sarah and Hagar to a new free Jerusalem and the old city of slavery (Gal. 5:21-26) but does not mention Ishmael by name.

In the Old Testament, Ishmael was blessed by God, named by God, had a mother who trusted in God, had twelve sons, was circumcised with Abraham, lived in the desert, and helped bury Abraham (Genesis 16—17; 21; 25).

Abraham pleaded with God to bless Ishmael: "Oh that Ishmael might live in your sight" (Gen. 17:18). It appears that he sidestepped the promise he did not understand and sought to direct God's interest to the tangible and certain—his own son Ishmael.<sup>14</sup> But God made it clear that his covenant would be through the son of the promise, given through Sarah, rather than the son of human will.

The Lord continued to exercise compassion and concern for Hagar (Gen. 16:7). As Brueggemann observed, everyone but God seemed to be ready to leave well enough alone.<sup>15</sup> Sarah

was harsh enough to Hagar to convince her to leave. Abraham let Sarah do as she pleased with Hagar. Hagar was forced to leave, with no place to go and no hope. But God intervened, sending her back to serve Sarah and blessing her with the promise of a son (Gen. 16:10).

### CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM TODAY

Would the promises and blessings of Ishmael or Isaac have contemporary application to the Middle East today? Contemporary developments in the Middle East have raised some serious questions and confusion. Did God fulfill his promise? How would this apply to our response to the Arab-Israeli conflict? Are Arab problems the result of a long tradition of Ishmael's disposition (Gen. 16:12)? Has the promise to Ishmael been fulfilled in the large Arab population in the world and the strength of Islam? Just how does prophecy relate to contemporary politics?

At this point, the complexities of the situation discourage many from proceeding further and settle for a more simplistic response. The resolution of these questions calls for adequate hermeneutical methods, insight into political situations that are too complex for a few people to solve, a biblical theology of last things, and an application of Christian ethics.

As the year 2000 approaches, the problems will intensify as certain evangelicals look for the signs of the end time. As they do, they continually place Israel at the heart of their interpretation. Their predictions exceed human jurisdiction since God alone knows the time and events of the end (Acts 1:7; Mt. 24:36). The abuse of prophecy also touches many areas of Christian ministry. Why, for example, should a freshman in college today prepare to do mission work if the Lord is going to return before he or she could finish college, graduate school, and learn the language? Or, more specifically, how can Christians communicate the gospel to the Arabs or Muslims when Christians in America have not shown the balanced concern that God had for *both* Sarah and Hagar? We need to know how to develop a responsible Christian position on the Arab-Israeli



conflict that will not create barriers to evangelism. We give little attention to prophecy or politics, so bridging the gap between these two spheres seems hopeless. The following observations may offer a place to begin in response to a persistent international problem.

1. A Christian position would need to be fair and even-handed, recognizing sin and injustice among all the parties involved.<sup>16</sup> God was extremely merciful to Hagar and Ishmael, who were victims of Sarah's good intentions of helping God fulfill his promise. God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was a covenant for all nations, even the descendants of Ishmael and Esau.

2. The unusual nature of God's interaction with Hagar must have left all Ishmael's descendants with an awareness and belief in a living God. Although this monotheism may not be traced directly to Islam, one can appreciate their desire to make it foundational to their own story.

3. Any witness to the resurrected Lord among Jews and Muslims would do well to begin with the call of Abraham and lead to an invitation to become children of Abraham.

Churches and organizations have issued statements in response to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Some of the practical suggestions they have made are summarized below. These come from *Statements and Position Papers of Major American Organizations on Middle East Peace*.<sup>17</sup>

1. Palestinians must recognize Israel as a sovereign state and Israel must officially recognize the right of the Palestinians to self-determination (National Council of Churches, November 6, 1980).

2. The Middle East conflict cannot be resolved by the use of force, so negotiations for a comprehensive settlement should come from a revision and implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 (World Council of Churches, July 1983).

3. Study the Scriptures with care to avoid oversimplification and distortion as well as reading responsible publications regarding the Middle East (American Baptist Churches, December 1980).

4. When Christians tour countries in the Middle East, make every effort to meet the Christians in the Jewish and Arab communities (American Lutheran Church, September 1982).

5. Christians are concerned that the victims of a Middle East arms race are so often children and old people caught between the warring parties. "These little wars are not little wars to the people victimized by them. They are a daily reality of death, pain, and separation—the very antithesis of the Gospel" (Disciples of Christ, September 1983).

6. "The suffering and injustices related to the displacement of the Palestinian Arabs in the Middle East continue to be a major ingredient in the conflict. Lasting peace in the area cannot be achieved without a just solution to the refugee problem" (Church of the Brethren, February 1975).

7. A just compensation should be provided for all those who have been deprived of home and property by the three decades of conflict (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 1978).

Beyond these verbal calls for peace, we need churches within the USA that want to show hospitality and Christian love to the many Arabs in our cities and universities. We need more Christians who will serve in a context that could help resolve the crisis and live in such a way that centuries of problems can be untangled. There is hope on both counts. Khalil Jahshan, a graduate of Harding University, a Palestinian, and a deacon in the church, is serving a vital role in helping educate our nation. He currently serves as executive director of the National Association of Arab Americans. He is seeking to bridge the gap between East and West and seeking peace.

Second, through campus ministries, international business associations, and special courses on Muslim evangelism in our schools, Christians are beginning to understand Muslims and live the gospel in such a way that we can commend ourselves to every Muslim's conscience in the sight of God (2 Cor. 4:1-6).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text Translation, and Commentary* (n.p.: McGregor & Werner, 1946), 631.



- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., 779, 841.  
<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 51.  
<sup>4</sup>H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 179.  
<sup>5</sup>Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1984), 163.  
<sup>6</sup>Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Charles Scribners, 1983), 216.  
<sup>7</sup>P. M. Holt, A. K. S. Lambton, and B. Lewis, eds., *The Cambridge History of Islam* (New York: Mentor, 1964), 44.  
<sup>8</sup>Patai, 216.  
<sup>9</sup>Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* (Chicago: Aldine, 1966), 96.  
<sup>10</sup>James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), 190.  
<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 194, 196.  
<sup>12</sup>Israel Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 236.  
<sup>13</sup>Irvine (1973), 291.  
<sup>14</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 203.  
<sup>15</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press 1982), 152.  
<sup>16</sup>Cf. Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?* (Batavia, Ill.: Lion Publishing, 1983), for a very objective analysis of the situation.  
<sup>17</sup>*Statements and Position Papers of Major American Organizations on Middle East Peace* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Associates, 1985), 13, 22, 28, 29, 36, 37, 44.

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