

A Study Guide to the Entire Bible

Part I

The Law and the History

Introduction to Part I

Part I consists of the study guides to the books of The Law, and the books of History; thus Part I consists of study guides to the first 17 books of the Bible: Genesis through Esther.

The Books of the Law

The first five books are called The Law. They are also called The Torah (Hebrew, "to teach or direct"), and the Pentateuch (Greek, "five tools"). The Books of the Law are generally believed to have been one writing originally, separated into five sections. The division into five separate books, and assignment of the separate names for the books, probably occurred at the time of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek, in Alexandria, about 300 BC¹.

Who Wrote the Books of the Law?

Critical (liberal) scholars usually teach that there was no single author of the Books of the Law². Rather, they say, the first 5 books of the Bible are merely the collection of accumulated tribal traditions, myths and fables, told and retold over many centuries, and thus containing error. Most say that none of it was put into writing until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (the time of the return from Assyrian and Babylonian captivity), about 400 BC. They also usually take the position that Moses could not have been the author of anything for, they say, he was just an illiterate sheep herder who could neither read nor write.

¹ The Old Testament probably has the distinction of being the first book in human history to be translated from one language to another, that is, from Hebrew to Greek, when the Septuagint Old Testament was translated at Alexandria, about 300 BC.

² As I explained in "Introductory Material," the terms "liberal" and "conservative" are imprecise and unsatisfactory to me; yet, for lack of better alternatives, these are the terms that we will generally use to refer to these two basic approaches to interpretation of the Scriptures.

Actually, however, Moses was reared in the Egyptian palace as Pharaoh's privileged grandson, and at a time when Egypt was the center of learning for the entire World. Thus he would have received the very best education possible then, and could probably read and write in 5 languages³. All internal evidence (that within the Bible itself) declares that Moses was the writer⁴. The unbroken Hebrew rabbinic tradition identifies the writer as Moses. Jesus recognized Moses as the author of the entire Pentateuch, which in His day was referred to as "The Law⁵."

A growing mountain of evidence declares the liberal scholars wrong; but they persist in what I consider to be their irrational position, for to admit that a supernatural God inspired a supernatural Book, describing actual miracles and containing supernatural prophecies, would be an insult to their humanistic, intellectual pride. It would also contradict what they have been taught, have sincerely believed, and have sincerely taught to others.

***NOTE:** As I have said, referring to "liberal" scholars presents difficulties for me. The matter of the two basic approaches to interpretation of Scriptures (liberal" and "conservative") is an inescapable reality, and at times it is necessary to refer to it. When doing so, I must be honest; yet I wish very much not to be (or appear to be) dismissive or adversarial when referring to the liberal (critical) approach. For a more thorough explanation of the different approaches see "The Vexing Problem of the 'Liberal' and 'Conservative' Division" in "A Personal Word from the Author" (Introductory Material). For a still more thorough explanation of the differences in approach to the Scriptures, see "The Debate over the Authority of Scripture" in Part V (Selected Topical Summaries).*

A Personal Note to the Reader about the Books of the Law

For most of us, I think, the New Testament is more appealing in a general sense than is the Old Testament. And, of all the Old Testament books, the least appealing for most of us are the first five--the Books of the Law. It all seems so harsh, so legalistic and unforgiving, so filled with "thou shalt nots," and with meticulously detailed and complicated requirements.

So it was for me for most of my life, even after I became a serious student, and teacher, of the Bible.

Then, about 20 years ago, I was strongly impressed that I should make a study of the Pentateuch, the five Books of the Law. It would probably not be inaccurate

³ See in this regard Acts 7:22.

⁴ Exodus 17:14, 24:1-7; John 1:45; Acts 7:22, et al.

⁵ John 7:19-23.

to say simply that the Lord required it of me. There was no audible voice speaking to me; but I **knew** that I had to do it, and that there was no avoiding it⁶. I was not just to read those first five books of the Bible; I was to study them. I obeyed; but, to put it mildly, I obeyed reluctantly. To my amazement, however, in the months that followed, I discovered that the Books of the Law are filled with repeated revelations of the loving tenderness of the heart of God. In the midst of all that legalistic harshness, which was apparently necessary in order to keep those rebellious, ungrateful, unfaithful, wandering Israelites out of trouble, I found, over and over, how much God cares for the poor, the defenseless, and the unwanted.

It is my prayer that the study of these first five books, the Pentateuch, the Holy Torah, will give you the same surprising pleasure, and the same new revelation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the loving God of the Old Testament, that they now give to me.

The Books of History

The 12 Books of History are just that. Although the five Books of Law also contain the history of man, from Creation through the Exodus from Egypt, they have, from the beginning, been considered a separate group of books. Beginning with the death of Moses and the succession of Joshua to the leadership position of Moses, the next 12 books record the history of God's people to the end of the Old Testament period. The Bible is not chronologically arranged. The books of Poetry and Prophecy (Parts II and III of this study guide) will take us, many times, back into the period covered by the Books of Law and History; but the 12 Books of History are essentially chronological, and will provide the framework for all the rest.

Tom Chase McKenney

⁶ This kind of internal nudging can be called by a number of names. Some would call it an impression; others call it a prompting of the Holy Spirit. Augustine, 4th/5th Century Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, simply called it "the voiceless voice of God."

Table of Contents, Part I

The Books of Law:⁷

| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Genesis - - - - - | Page 5 |
| Exodus - - - - - | Page 56 |
| Leviticus - - - - - | Page 81 |
| Numbers - - - - - | Page 91 |
| Deuteronomy - - - - - | Page 100 |

The Books of History:

| | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Joshua - - - - - | Page 108 |
| Judges - - - - - | Page 118 |
| Ruth - - - - - | Page 131 |
| I Samuel - - - - - | Page 134 |
| II Samuel - - - - - | Page 149 |
| I Kings - - - - - | Page 165 |
| II Kings - - - - - | Page 188 |
| I Chronicles - - - - - | Page 213 |
| II Chronicles - - - - - | Page 219 |
| Ezra - - - - - | Page 234 |
| Nehemiah - - - - - | Page 240 |
| Esther - - - - - | Page 246 |

⁷ **These page numbers will not be valid once the formatting is finalized.**

The Law, Book 1

Genesis

The Book of Genesis (the word is Greek, meaning “Origin”) is the record of the first 2,500 years of human existence; this one remarkable book is the history of more than 1/3 of all that has occurred since the creation of the Universe⁸.

Genesis records the creation, Adam and Eve in Paradise, the fall of man, the great flood and the replenishing of the Earth, the creation of the Israelite people through Abraham and the other patriarchs, and the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt. Genesis ends with the death of Joseph in Egypt.

*NOTE: Dr. Henry Morris has observed the following about Genesis: "In a very real sense, the Book of Genesis is the most important book in the world, for it is the foundation upon which all the other 65 books of God's written Word have been based. When Jesus, after His resurrection, gave a key Bible study to his disciples on the way to Emmaus, He began with Genesis!" (Lk 24:27)*⁹.

A. Author. The human author was almost certainly Moses. Unbroken Hebrew tradition attributes the entire Pentateuch to Moses, as does all the internal evidence within the Bible, including the words of Moses and Jesus. Jesus attributed the entire Law to Moses (Luke 24:27, 44; Mark 7:10, 12:26; John 5:46, 7:19-24), as did the Apostle John (John 1:17). Ancient secular writers, including Tacitus and Juvenal, attributed the entire Law to Moses.

Unlike the other four Books of the Law, Moses was not an eyewitness to any of the events in the Book of Genesis, for the Genesis record closes about 300 years

⁸ The mathematics here are based on the traditional dating for creation, about 6,000 BC; there are many students of the Bible who believe that the Universe is much older.

⁹ Morris, Henry M., PhD, LL.D, Litt.D. *The New Defender's Study Bible*, (Nashville, World Publishing, Inc., 1995, 2006) p 5.

before his birth. The probability is that Moses, inspired by the Spirit of God, assembled the ancient records previously kept by prominent men of the Genesis period such as Adam, Enoch, Noah, and the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)

¹⁰.

(Put Susan's time overlap chart before the flood in Part IV here!)

B. Place and Date. Genesis was probably written at Mt. Sinai, in the wilderness, about 1,500 BC (see Exodus 24:1-7).

NOTE: When we think of "wilderness," most of us think of a forest or jungle, but this wilderness was nothing like that; this wilderness was (and still is) a dry, desolate, desert area, with plants existing only around springs, wells and streambeds.

C. Occasion. At Mount Sinai, God delivered the Law to Moses, commanded him to write it down in a book, and to read it to the people (Exodus 24:1-7). He had previously instructed Moses to write of the victory over Amalek (Exodus 17:14), so that the record of that event would be preserved. It is likely that Moses also assembled the Genesis records there, during the same period; this is the ancient Jewish tradition¹¹.

D. Theme. The theme of this foundational book is the fact of God's creation and his perfect, forward-looking plan for mankind. It has been proposed that every major doctrine of the Bible has its roots in Genesis.

E. The Style of the Early Chapters. The early chapters of Genesis, especially the first 4 chapters, present the foundational record for everything else that follows in the Bible. These early chapters describe events of cosmic importance, beginning with the creation of our solar system, the origin of man, his relationships with God, and the earliest periods of human history. And yet these events are presented in so few words, in such lean, bare-bones prose, that we must flesh out the stories ourselves by expanding on the clear implications of what is actually written in the text. For example, consider the first verse of Chapter One: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." Here are 10 brief words; yet their meaning would justify several large books! For example, what is meant by,

¹⁰ Enoch's life overlapped Adam's for 300 years, so perhaps he was the first record-keeper. There is an Arab legend that credits Enoch with having "invented writing"; it is interesting, but only a legend. Perhaps God created writing when He created Adam and directed him to name the living creatures. The fact is that we just don't know when writing, as we know it, began, or how it came about.

¹¹ The traditional site of Mt. Sinai is in the lower Sinai desert. In recent times, Jim and Penny Caldwell of Diamondhead, Mississippi, after many years of research in the area, believe that they have discovered the actual Red Sea crossing site and Mt. Sinai at the upper end of the Gulf of Aqaba. They have an interesting rationale and some interesting evidence, but are barred from the site by the Saudi government today.

"the beginning"? When was it? Where was it? How do we understand "the beginning"; did anything exist before it?

For this reason, the wording of the highlights in the early chapters of Genesis will be brief, compared with the rest that will follow, sometimes dealing with only one verse. However, to compensate for this, there will be sub-headings within the highlights, and there will often be expansive explanatory notes. We simply can't just pass by these tremendously important events with the few words of the text. The inferences we draw from the implications in the text will be valid and justified; but they will still be inferences, and it is necessary to understand this from the beginning of the study of this amazing book. You will quickly see this unfold as we tackle the early chapters.

F. Highlights. Almost the entire book consists of highlights; however, selected ones include the following:

1. The Creation Account. (Chapter 1)

The creation account, which Dr. Henry Halley calls "The Creation Hymn" because of its poetic style and beauty, deals with foundational concepts of origins, matter, time and space, life, and human existence. And it raises some profoundly fundamental questions, including the following:

a. "In the Beginning God...". (1:1)

How do we interpret "In the beginning, God..."? Did God Himself have a beginning? The problem here is that this is an **infinite** concept--one which our **finite** minds cannot grasp. However, we must try; and, for us, the best answer to the question seems to be that God has always existed, living outside of time. His unique name is a Hebrew word without vowels, "YHWH," which means "the self-existent one,"--that is, His existence depends upon no other person or thing, and that all that we can know about Him is what He tells us about Himself. There is no source of knowledge of Him, other than Himself¹². He had no creator--He is the effect without a cause. Since, as we shall see in Exodus 3, He calls Himself the great "I AM" (not the great "I Was" or the great "I Shall Be"), God lives outside of time.

For God, then, it seems, there is no past or future--just one enormous present. Because of this, it is not remarkable that He knows what will happen, in what we call the future. As the great prophet Isaiah expressed it, God is unique, "declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done..." (Isaiah 46:10). If you still don't clearly understand this, don't feel inadequate--neither does anyone else.

¹² This four-letter name of God is sometimes referred to as the Tetragrammaton. For an explanation of the names of God and their significance, see "Notes on the Names of God" in Part V, (Selected Topical Summaries).

Remember that this is an infinite concept, thus beyond the comprehension of our finite minds. This, along with such concepts as the Trinity, and the declaration of Jesus that, "Before Abraham was, I am," falls into the category which theologians rightly call a "mystery." We can only do our inadequate best to try to understand, with our finite minds, these things that cannot be understood. Albert Einstein, one of the most brilliant and informed thinkers in human history, died wishing that he could understand infinite matters of time, space and eternity.

(1) Questions of Time and Eternity. Did time exist before the creation? If not, when did time begin, and when will it end? For us as individuals, it seems, time began with the Creation of Genesis 1:1; and it will apparently end when we step into the presence of God, to dwell with Him in a timeless place forever¹³. It seems that time was first divided into weeks, months and days, with a calendar system for keeping track of time, in the Exodus, when the Passover celebration was first established (Exodus 12:2).

(2). Was There a Pre-Adamic Creation? Some believe that there were 2 creations. According to this theory, the first creation, which they call the "pre-Adamic" creation, took place in the period recorded in Genesis 1:1. Between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 (goes the theory) during many millions (perhaps billions) of years, this original creation went sour when Satan and his fallen angels rebelled and were expelled from Heaven. During this time monsters were produced on the Earth, and cataclysmic wars and geologic upheavals so contaminated and distorted the Earth that God destroyed it. Then, using the original matter, the first creation was replaced by God with the second creation, as described in Genesis 1:2 and all that follows. This theory would account for such things as extinct dinosaurs and the geologic evidence of violent upheavals in the Earth's crust. This theory is also more compatible with secular theories of a very old Earth, and evolution. As one bit of evidence for this theory, its proponents cite God's command in Genesis 1:28, that mankind "Be fruitful and replenish the earth." How, they ask, can the earth be "replenished" if it had never before been "plenished"¹⁴?

The issue of the Pre-Adamic Creation seems to be one of those unanswerable questions. Some very credible students of the Bible have embraced this theory, but most have rejected it for lack of evidence.

2. The Six Days of Creation. (1:2-2:3)

Were there six literal days of creation--that is, six days of 24 hours each? Or were the six "days" actually six ages or epochs, each one a vast period of time (the

¹³ In terms of Creation and mankind, time will end with the return of Christ in the Last Day.

¹⁴ "Plenished" is not a commonly used word, but is used here to explain part of the basis for the theory. It means "to supply, provide or furnish"; the prefix "re" means to do it a second (or subsequent) time.

"day-age" theory)? This question arises from the fact that the Hebrew word here, *yowm*, means "day," but is sometimes translated as "age." Opinions differ, and we won't settle the issue here; but I am inclined to believe that it was six literal days. One suggestion of literal days is the fact that the Hebrew word comes from a root word meaning, "warm or hot," as in the comparison between cool nights, and warm or hot days. Another suggestion of literal days is the repetition of the phrase "evening and morning" in describing each day.

Yet another argument against the day-age theory is that, although we are dealing with one word that can be rendered in two ways, the two renderings are not necessarily interchangeable. We can **always** translate *yowm* as "day" and never change the meaning of any passage. For example, in Genesis 18:11 Abraham is described as being "well stricken in **age**." Here, we could change the word to "**days**" and not alter the meaning in any way. On the other hand, when the word is rendered "day," changing it to "age" can drastically alter the meaning. For example, in Genesis 25:31, where Esau sells his birthright to Jacob, "Sell me this day thy birthright" cannot be validly translated as "Sell me this age thy birthright." In Daniel 6:10, when Daniel prayed three times each day, disobeying the decree of King Darius, the passage cannot be validly translated "...he kneeled upon his knees three times an age and prayed...."

Still another argument against the "day-age" theory is that green plants were created on the 3rd day, and the Sun was not created until the 4th day. If there were millions, or billions, of years between the 3rd day and the 4th day, the green plants would have perished, for they require sunlight to exist and function.

Like the pre-Adamic creation theory, many serious students of the Bible embrace the day-age theory, holding that each day of creation was actually a vast period of time, an age or epoch. This interpretation of the six days of creation allows for a very old Earth, and makes it easier to reconcile the Genesis account with atheistic, evolutionary theories of the origins of the Universe. This is another reason that I don't like the day-age theory, for we don't need to bend our beliefs to conform to those of unbelievers; the wisdom of man is foolishness to God, and the Genesis account has nothing for which to apologize.

***NOTE:** in Chapter 1 there are fascinating glimpses into the mystery of the triune nature of God. In verse 1, and throughout the creation account, we see His name spelled "God"; this means that the Hebrew word here is "Elohim." In Hebrew, words ending in "im" are plurals, and "Elohim" suggests a plurality within the Godhead. This plurality is made more clear in verse 26, where Elohim says, "Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness...." Who then, we must ask, are "us"? And here we enter the realm of mystery, but it appears that we are*

glimpsing the Holy Trinity, the concept that there is one God who exists in 3 separate persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we shall see, since there is no person greater than God, when He swears, He can only swear by Himself (Genesis 22:16; Hebrews 6:13). By the same token, it seems that when He takes counsel, as He seems to be doing here in verse 26, since there is no one else who knows what He knows, He takes counsel only with Himself. For an explanation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, see "The Mystery of the Holy Trinity" in Part V (Selected Topical Summaries).

3. The Way It Was. (2:4-6)

It is apparent from all evidence that there was a canopy of mist (ice crystals at high altitudes) over the Earth and a universal, sub-tropical climate. There was no need for rain, and all was protected from the destructive effects of direct ultraviolet light and other ionizing radiation.

NOTES:

a. Here in Chapter 2, for the first time, God is identified by His unique name. When, in the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible, "LORD" or "GOD" appears, in all capital letters, the Hebrew name represented is YAHWEH (or JEHOVAH). For a thorough explanation of this and its significance, see "Notes on the Names of God" in Part V (Selected Topical Summaries).

b. As evidence of this pre-Flood, universal, sub-tropical climate, fossils of tropical plants and animals are found in all parts of the Earth, including both the Arctic and Antarctic regions. For example, on Ellesmere Island, the northernmost land mass in North America, where day temperatures can be 45 degrees below zero in June, the ice cap is 1/2 mile deep, and the nearest tree of any kind is 1,200 miles to the south, there are, in the frozen ground, remains of "a warm, primeval swamp," with fossilized, and near-fossilized, remains of Dawn Redwood trees, alligators, constrictor snakes, plus flying lemurs, now found only in the jungles of Southeast Asia. An article in National Geographic concludes, "What could explain such a radically different climate? The causes remain a mystery¹⁵." For us believers, with a knowledge of Genesis, there is no mystery.

c. It appears that this condition prevailed until the time of the flood, when the enormous amount of rain dissipated the water vapor in the protective canopy. At that time, vast, dramatic, changes took place on the Earth, creating air currents, changing cyclic weather patterns, extreme heat in the tropics, and extreme cold in the Polar Regions.

¹⁵ National Geographic, June 1988, pages 750-767.

After the Flood, it seems likely, full exposure to ultraviolet light (and perhaps other factors) caused accelerated aging and shortening life spans. It is significant that after the Flood life spans began to drop markedly, from about 900 years before the Great Flood, to 600 years in the case of Shem, who lived most of his life after the Flood, to Abraham who lived 175 years, to the present time when life spans are typically from 70-120 years. This is only a theory, but the statistics are compelling, and I know of no better explanation.

4. The Creation of Man. (2:7)

Adam is created, formed "of the dust of the ground"¹⁶. God breathes life into him, and the first man becomes a living soul. Does this mean that God took a pile of dry soil and molded it into the form of a man? No one but God knows the answer to this, but probably not. What we can know, however, is that a chemical analysis of a human body will reveal that it is constructed of the very same chemical elements (carbon, nitrogen, hydrogen, iron, calcium, etc) that are to be found in the earth beneath our feet. The Hebrew word rendered "dust" here is *aphar*, meaning dust, earth, mud, etc. It can also mean "ashes", almost certainly due to the similar consistency of dust and ashes.

5. The Garden of Eden. (2:8-15)

The Lord creates a natural paradise "eastward in Eden" and gives it to Adam to live in. "Eden" is a Hebrew word meaning "delight" or "pleasure." He will not only live there, but he is responsible for its care¹⁷.

a. Where Was the Garden? Genesis locates Eden at the upper end of the Tigris/Euphrates Valley, and all scientific evidence agrees; thus the region is called the "the cradle of civilization." The exact location is unknown.

b. What about the 4 Rivers Named? Two of the four rivers mentioned are known today: the Tigris (ancient name, Hiddekel) and the Euphrates. But what about the other two rivers? The Gihon, which "compassed the whole land of Ethiopia," may be the Nile. The Pison, which "compassed the whole land of Havilah," is anyone's guess¹⁸.

6. One Simple Rule in Paradise. (2:16-17)

¹⁶ Adam's name, in Hebrew *adam*, means "man" or "mankind." It is related to the word, *adama*, meaning "earth"; God's play on words here is obvious, and fascinating.

¹⁷ Notice that although God created a paradise for Adam to live in, Adam still had the responsibility for taking care of it; Adam didn't just lie around, sniffing the flowers. I believe that Heaven will be a busy existence for us--stress free, but busy and fulfilling. The common caricature of Heaven as a place where we will float around on clouds, doing nothing, or playing harps, is not only uninviting to me, but is entirely unscriptural.

¹⁸ We must remember that the face of the Earth was greatly altered by the cataclysmic geologic events associated with the Great Flood.

When God created the paradise in Eden for Adam, He established only one simple rule: he may not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam may enjoy all the rest of the delicious fruit, but must not eat that one. If he should eat of that fruit, he is warned, he shall surely die.

7. The Creation of the Animals. (2:18-20)

The Lord creates the animals and brings them to Adam for naming. Note the ability of Adam to name all the animals, remembering the names, so as not to use the same name twice. This seems supernatural--but why not? It seems that when he was created he had a perfect mind, not encumbered with sin, distraction or aging. Keeping all the names straight was not a problem.

8. The Creation of Woman. (2:21-25)

God sees a need and creates Eve, making both Adam and Paradise complete. Causing "a deep sleep" to come over Adam, God removes a rib, and from it creates a wife for him¹⁹. In this it might be said that Adam experienced the very first general anaesthetic. It seems that Adam is still responsible for naming everything, and he says that she shall be called "Woman" because she was taken out of Man²⁰. Now Adam is complete, with a wife of the very same substance as his own, and both are created in the image of God. Paradise is complete, and Adam and Eve have it made. All they have to do is enjoy one another, enjoy the garden, enjoy unhindered fellowship with God, and obey one simple rule.

9. Enter the Serpent. (3:1-6)

The Tempter and Father of Lies enters Paradise in the form of a serpent to tempt and deceive Eve ("Yea, hath God said...ye shall not surely die"). She falls for the lie, eats the forbidden fruit, and then shares her disobedience with Adam²¹. Note that here we see, from the lips of Satan, what might be thought of as the first "Revised Version" of the Word of God; when Eve quotes to the Serpent the clear words of God, he replies, "Yea, hath God said...?". Interjecting human reasoning into the issue, he causes Eve to question the plain words of God. Like today's revisionist, liberal/critical scholars, she allows the "way that seemeth right to a man" to take precedence over what God has clearly said; and, to Eve, that forbidden fruit begins to look "not really forbidden." She eats it, gives some to Adam and he eats it, and the deed is done. It is interesting to compare the process of seduction in Eve described in 3:6, with the nature of temptation and sin outlined in James 1:13-16; the similarity is pretty amazing.

¹⁹ There is a folk belief that, as a result of Adam's losing a rib here, all men have one less rib than women. This is not true, of course; men with one leg amputated do not produce one-legged children.

²⁰ The Hebrew word rendered "Eve" means "life" or "life-giving"; thus she is the life-giving mother of all mankind.

²¹ It should be noted that while Eve sinned because she was deceived, Adam then chose to join her by sinning deliberately, thereby having the greater fault.

10. The Loss of Innocence. (3:7)

Innocence, once lost, cannot be regained. Adam and Eve suddenly experience the need to cover their nakedness. Their "fig leaf" effort to solve the problem is vividly symbolic of man's inability to produce a remedy for his own sin. As we shall see later in Chapter 3 (verse 21), God's remedy, the only valid one, requires the shedding of blood and the death of another.

11. Death and Fear Enter God's Perfect Creation. (3:8-10)

Adam and Eve die. They do not die physically, but they die spiritually, and they will pass on that spiritual death to all their descendants, including you and me. Physical death and killing will soon appear, with innocent blood staining the new Earth; but it begins with spiritual death. time begin And death will reign until Christ purifies the Earth, cleanses it of death, and restores paradise at the end of the age (Revelation 20:14). But here, immediately, spiritual death occurs, and with it comes the fruit of spiritual death: fear. This destructive emotion, something previously unknown, strikes Adam and Eve; and, in fear, they foolishly think they can hide from God. God, of course, knows exactly where Adam is, but he sets him up by asking.

12. Passing the Buck. (3:11-14)

With their newly acquired sinful nature now on full display, Adam and Eve make excuses, trying to pass the blame to others. Adam first attempts to blame God ("The woman whom **thou** gavest to be with me..."), but quickly shifts the blame to Eve. Eve in turn blames the Serpent. And the Serpent, at the end of the line, so to speak, with no one else to blame, hears some bad news from God. He shall be cursed above all animals, shall crawl on his belly in the dust and shall eat dust²².

13. A Glimpse of God's Plan of Redemption. (3:15)

Here, in this tragic scene of man's first rebellion against God and the unfolding consequences of his sin, we are given a fascinating glimpse into God's gracious plan for making it all right again. He states that there will be everlasting enmity between the Serpent's descendants and the woman's descendants. He further states that the Serpent's seed will "bruise the heel" of the woman's seed, but that the woman's seed will "bruise the head" of the Serpent's seed. Notice that the one who would someday come to bruise the head of the Serpent and defeat him would be **her** seed (not Adam's and hers--just hers)²³. In God's plan for redeeming sinful man and restoring him to a right relationship with God, we are here shown that

²² The word, "serpent," is derived from the Latin verb *serpere*, meaning "to creep." Could it be that serpents once walked upright? There is scientific evidence to suggest that they once did; pythons have a pelvic girdle but no limbs. Eating dust does not mean that dust shall be the serpent's food; but because it will catch and eat its prey on the ground, it will necessarily eat dirt with the prey.

²³ See in this regard Galatians 4:4.

Eve's descendant, whom Satan would wound but who would, in turn, conquer Satan, would be a Man with no earthly father. Therefore He would not inherit Adam's sin nature and would be uniquely qualified to be the Redeemer of mankind. And all of this wonderful revelation is presented in just one verse!

14. Aspects of a Sin-Cursed Earth. (3:16-19)

Because of the entrance of sin, Adam and Eve and their descendants will be living out their lives on a sin-cursed Earth. Women will experience sickness and pain in child-bearing. Men will labor constantly to produce food in soil where weeds and thorns flourish and make the process a struggle. And, now that death has entered the scene, people will eventually die physically, decompose, and return to the dust from which man was first created. Because with sin there will be inherent disorder, God establishes a fundamental rule: the man will be the head of his family, with responsibility for maintaining order.

15. Paradise Lost. (3:20-24)

Adam gives his wife the name "Eve" (*life spring*) because, he says, "she will be the mother of all living"²⁴. God makes proper clothing for Adam and Eve of the skins of animals. Then they are driven from the Garden; their paradise is lost, and they must find their way and survive in the Earth that they have cursed by their disobedience. Thinking that they could impose their human reasoning and nullify the words of God ("Yea, hath God **really** said that?" Oh, surely He didn't mean it **that** way..."), they became fools (Romans 1:22). And now they will have to live with the consequences of their foolishness; God places cherubim, and a flaming sword, swishing back and forth to guard the entrance to the Garden so that no One can enter. There is now no turning back.

NOTES:

*a. Was the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden a literal event, or was it figurative? It was probably both. However, whether literal, figurative or both, the result was **separation from God**--loss of the unimpaired fellowship they had enjoyed with Him before.*

b. They can no longer reach the source of everlasting life (the Tree of Life). Christ's atonement will make it possible for us to be restored as individuals to a right relationship with God, and to have everlasting life spiritually; but we still must live out our lives in a sin-cursed world. The fruit of the Tree of Life (vv 22-24) will be freely available to the redeemed in the paradise of the New Earth (Rev 22:2).

²⁴ It is interesting to note that, today, geneticists are finding evidence to suggest that everyone alive today is descended from a single woman (not a single man). For obvious reasons, geneticists call this hypothetical original female human ancestor, "Eve."

c. Man will not return to the Paradise that was lost until the ultimate Restoration described in prophecies and in Revelation 21 and 22. And this, it seems, will bring the story of man on the Earth to full cycle--back to where it all began in Genesis 2.

d. Another interesting thing about all this is that it seems, prior to The Fall, there were no carnivorous animals. Eating only plants, there was no death of any kind, and no need for it. But, with The Fall, predatory animals become carnivores, preying on weaker animals, and killing became necessary for their survival. Prophecies of the Restoration, in Isaiah 11:7,8 and 65:25, state that the predatory animals will again eat only plants, and will dwell peacefully with lambs and other helpless animals. There is, in this, a clear implication that Adam and Eve were vegetarians, and that man will return to that state in the Restoration. This, of course, cannot be known with certainty.

*e. A cherub (plural, "cherubim") is a created angelic being which does the bidding of God. By the Middle Ages, the common conception of a cherub became a chubby, babe-in-arms sort of creature, usually with wings, smiling benevolently down upon us; but **nothing** could be farther from the truth! A real cherub is a huge, fierce, warrior-angel that would terrify us if we should see one. You will notice that, in the Bible, when an angel appears to humans, his first words are almost always, "Fear not"; for his sudden appearance is a terrifying experience, and we mortals need to be calmed and reassured²⁵.*

e. Fascinating Evidence from Anthropology and Archeology. Research in cultural Anthropology has revealed that primitive cultures, all over the world, which had no previous contact with one another, have been found to have a creation tradition of a prior time when man lived in a paradise state, of the loss of that state, and a universal flood. How could this be explained? It appears that the Genesis account was passed down from Adam to Enoch and others, quite naturally to Noah and his sons, and thence to their descendants who settled in the various parts of the Earth. The most accurate traditions (similar to the Genesis account) are those in the region of the Euphrates Valley where it all began; in more distant regions, such as Mongolia, India, Polynesia and South America, the beliefs are more distorted, but still recognizable. This seems logical, for the farther people spread in distance and time, from the area where it all began, the more their oral traditions would naturally become distorted.

²⁵ C. S. Lewis observed that, whereas the first words of angelic beings (including cherubim), suddenly appearing to people in the Bible, their first words are "Fear not," the current misconception is that of a kindly, comforting creature, whose first words would be, "There, there."

***Two Ancient Seals.** Amazing evidence of this exists in the form of two ancient seals, discovered in the Euphrates Valley, where it all began. One, called the Temptation Seal, was found among ancient Babylonian tablets and is now in the British Museum. It clearly shows a man and woman, picking fruit from a tree, with a snake **standing upright** behind the woman, as if whispering to her. The other, called the Adam and Eve Seal, was found near Nineveh and is now in the Pennsylvania University Museum in Philadelphia. Dated at 3,500 BC, it shows a man and woman, naked, walking bent over and downcast, followed by a snake. These two ancient seals are so true to the Genesis account that they could almost be used as illustrations for it.*

16. Cain, Abel, and Conflict. (4:1-7)

Eve begins to bear children and has two sons, Cain and Able. Born into a sin-cursed world, the two are very different, and conflict arises between them leading to the first murder in human history. Abel was "a keeper of sheep," while Cain was a cultivator of vegetable crops, "a tiller of the ground." As is true of the rest of the early record of man in the Genesis account, here we are told a very great deal in very few words, and must fill in the blanks for ourselves. Although the perfect relationship with God was lost in the fall of Adam and Eve, God apparently still provided a limited way for man to relate to Him through a system of sacrificial offerings. For some reason not explained, Abel's offering of sheep pleased God, but Cain's vegetable offering did not please God, and Cain was offended²⁶. In a clear example of the grace and love of God, He takes the trouble to warn Cain that his bad attitude, if not checked, will lead to grief; but Cain doesn't heed the warning.

17. The First Murder. (4:8)

Although God has graciously warned Cain about his resentment of Abel (and, it is almost certain, his resentment of God, for that is a very natural reaction of our unredeemed human nature), Cain allows his resentment to fester and grow until it leads him to a confrontation with Abel out in a field. Thinking that they are alone, Cain murders his younger brother and, it seems, hides the body. But, of course, God is there, and sees it all.

18. The First Lie (and It Didn't Work). (4:9)

In a scene reminiscent of God's asking Adam and Eve where they are and why are they hiding, He asks Cain where his brother is. Cain lies, but of course it doesn't work. And then he tries to justify himself by insolently asking God, "Am I

²⁶ The probable reason that God was not pleased with Cain's offering is that there was no shedding of blood, while Abel's offering of a lamb was a foreshadow of the ultimate sacrifice for the sin debt of mankind, the atoning death of Jesus the Christ (John 1:29-36; Hebrews 9:22).

my brother's keeper?" Of the many quotations from Scripture in common usage today, this is one of the most commonly used.

NOTE: God is the great asker of rhetorical questions. We have already seen him ask Adam and Eve why they are behaving in such a strange way, and now He asks Cain what has become of Abel. Later we shall see Him asking Elijah why he is in a far-away cave, hiding from Jezebel. But here Cain has the insolence to ask a rhetorical question of God: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Perhaps there is here a glimpse of the fundamental nature of the sin of rebellion: presuming to exchange roles with God.

19. Cain's Punishment. (4:10-16)

God, of course, knew the answer to his question before He asked it, and He isn't pleased. He tells Cain that his brother's blood, which has soaked into the ground and disappeared from human view, cries out to God for justice. Does this mean that Abel's blood has a voice and can speak? Probably not; but the fact that Abel's innocent blood has been spilled offends the justice that is a fundamental part of God's nature, and it will not be ignored. Cain is driven away from the new home of Adam and his family, to wander in something called "the land of Nod," tilling the soil under special, difficult, limitations. A special mark is placed upon Cain as



...Cain rose up against his brother, Abel, and slew him.

Gen 4:8b

a warning to others not to kill him; this, it seems, is a measure to prevent untimely death from shortening Cain's punishment.

NOTES:

a. The Mark of Cain is a mystery, one which has been the subject of speculation for many centuries. Just what it was is not known; but, whatever it was, it could not have been passed down to men today, for Cain's hereditary line all perished in the Great Flood.

b. "Nod" is a Hebrew word which means "wandering." Was it an actual place, or was the name symbolic? It was probably both.

20. Cain Takes a Wife. (4:17)

After Cain is banished to the Land of Nod, his wife conceives and bears a son, Enoch.

NOTE: *Here again, the Genesis account is so concise that it is only by implication that we are apprised of the important fact that Cain **has** a wife; but he obviously does. Also obviously, still another question presents itself: where did Cain get his wife²⁷?*

This question is often asked by unbelievers in attempting to discredit the Bible, and it is inescapable. It is almost certain that she was one of his many sisters (Jewish tradition has it that Adam and Eve had 33 sons and 27 daughters). Marriage to close relatives would not become a genetic problem for many, many generations. In fact, there were probably no genetic mutations at this time, thus no pathological genetic traits to be inherited, until after the Great Flood, when the Earth was first fully exposed to the destructive effects of ionizing radiation in sunlight.

Even after the appearance of undesirable genetic traits (and when these first appeared is unknown), the risk was greatly reduced by polygamy and the very large families that were typical of the time. Perhaps the reason for God's allowing a man to have more than one wife in ancient times was to diversify the gene pool. Sarah, Abraham's wife, was also his half-sister. Such relationships would not be proscribed by Scripture until the writing of Leviticus (Lev 18), about 1450 BC; but that entire passage refers to sexual activity outside of marriage (not marriage) except for one verse (v 18, speaking of marrying your first wife's sister to spite your first wife--it must have been a not-uncommon practice then). As recently as the times of Kings David and Solomon, 450 years after Leviticus 18, both David and Solomon had many wives (Solomon, with 1,000 wives and concubines was in a class all his own). And, it appears that

²⁷ For a more thorough enquiry into this issue, see "Two Mysteries in Genesis" in Part V (Selected Topical Summaries).

David's son Amnon would have been allowed to marry his beautiful half- sister, Tamar, had he not cruelly raped her, and even then the poor girl pleaded with the sociopathic swine to marry her (II Samuel 13:13).

It is not known when polygamy came to an end under the Old Covenant, and God seems never to have expressed his displeasure over multiple wives; but polygamy clearly came to an end with the close of the Old Covenant period. Jesus clearly taught monogamy for Christians, and severely restricted the allowance for divorce to cases of adultery by one or both spouses.

21. The descendants of Cain. (4:18-24)

There follows a listing of the rest of the descendants of Cain, including one called Lamech. All we are told of Lamech is that he had two wives and was a self-confessed murderer "of a young man to my hurting." He states that he is a worse sinner even than Cain, his great, great, great grandfather. Thus the genealogy of Cain ends, on this very dismal note²⁸.

22. Seth is Born. (4:25-26)

At some point after this, Eve again conceives and gives birth to a son whom she calls Seth; she considers him to be a replacement for the murdered Abel. Seth in turn has a son whom he names, Enos; and here, again, with a few unexplained words, the account presents us with another mystery. We are told that, with the birth of Enos, "then began men to call upon the name of the Lord"; but we are not told what is meant by that. It can't mean that men had never before called upon the name of the Lord, for both Cain and Abel had presented sacrifices to Him. It may mean that in the time of Seth a systematic form of worship was begun. A marginal reading of this verse is "then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord"; perhaps it means that the righteous descendants of Adam and Eve set themselves apart from the unrighteous, in establishment of systematic worship. In this sense, both renderings of the verse would be valid.

23. Two Fundamental Facts Repeated. (5:1-2)

At the beginning of the history of the generations of Adam in Chapter 5, two extremely fundamental facts are made clear. These facts have already been stated in Chapter 1, and we should wonder why they are repeated in Chapter 5²⁹. In Hebrew and in Aramaic, a similar language used by the Jewish common people after the Babylonian captivity, emphasis is expressed by repetition. For this reason, Jesus often said "verily, verily" (truly, truly) to emphasize the importance

²⁸ There is one valid lesson in this brief account of Lamech: in addition to the other victims, we are also always victims of our own sins.

²⁹ These fundamental facts are first stated in Chapter 1, verses 26 and 27.

of a point in teaching, and the reliability of what He was about to say. Here, at the beginning of the only history of mankind before the Flood, two points are repeated from Chapter 1:

a. We are created in the image of God. There is probably no one who knows exactly what this means; however, it means that God, in some way, has imparted to man something of his own nature. This is true of no other form of animal life; and it makes dangerous deceivers of those "animal rights" radicals who deny God, worship nature, and contend that man is no more important than snail darters, spotted owls, or kangaroo rats.

b. God created only two genders: male and female. This is His perfect plan: man and woman make a perfectly matched pair, fitting perfectly in every way, and perfectly completing and fulfilling one another.

NOTE: In verses 3-20 are listed the generations from Adam to the birth of Enoch, the perfect servant of God. Enoch lived only 365 years and begat Methuseleh and other sons and daughters. At this age he walked closely with God; and God took him into his presence. Enoch seems to be one of only two humans who have never experienced natural, physical death, the other being Elijah, whom the Lord took up to heaven in a whirlwind (II Kings 2:11). It is generally believed that the two witnesses of Revelation (Rev 11:3-12) will be Enoch and Elijah, and in the last days they will be put to death, raised from the dead and taken up into Heaven.

24. The generations from Enos to Noah. (5:21-32)

The rest of Chapter 5 is a summary of the history of man up to the time of the Great Flood³⁰. During this time when people usually lived about 900 years, the age of maturity seems to have been about 100. Mahaliel was only 65 when he begat Jared, which would seem to qualify him as precocious--a very young father. Methuseleh sets the all-time record for long life by living 969 years.

The length of Methusaleh's life is 969 years, three numerals, each representing a multiple of three, which represents divinity; thus Methusaleh's life span represents multiplied divinity. Does it have symbolic meaning? Probably, and the same is true of Lamech, his son, who lived 777 years³¹. The length of Lamech's life, 777 years, consists of three numerals, each representing completion or perfection. Since three is the number meaning divinity or God, the number 777 represents divine perfection; this may tell us something about Lamech's life and God's plan for him. God must have had a very special plan for these two godly men.

³⁰ It is the history only of the line of Seth; beyond this point there is no further mention of the descendants of Cain, and they will become extinct as a result of the Great Flood.

³¹ In the Bible, from beginning to end, numbers are significant; some scholars specialize in the study of such numbers and their specialty is called "biblical numerology." We should have some familiarity with it; but, for most of us, it soon becomes stifling.

a. Enoch. Enoch, one of only two people in human history who never experienced human death, was only 365 years old when "God took him"; he was still young! This amazing event is not explained; all we have in the record are the familiar words, "Enoch walked with God and he was not; for God took him." The clear implication is that Enoch must have had a very special, close relationship with God, and that God has a very special plan for him³².

b. Methuselah. Enoch's son, Methuselah, has the distinction of being the longest-living person on record. He lived to be 969, and was 187 before his first son was born; he definitely did not rush into things!

c. Noah. Noah, Lamech's son and Methuselah's grandson, was the last in the line of the pre-Flood (antediluvian) patriarchs, and he had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. It appears that he may have been 500 when he begat Shem; if so, he was even more slow to act than Methuselah; but the wording of verse 32 isn't clear.

25. The Great Mystery of Genesis 6. (6:1-4)

In Genesis 6:1-4 there is a brief account of the early days of the multiplication of man on the newly created Earth--a passage that has puzzled men for a very long time. In fact, when Moses sat on Mt. Sinai, compiling the ancient records into the book of Genesis, I can see him scratching his head as he copied this passage, wondering, as did the bystanders in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, "what meaneth this?" Millions of scholarly words have been written about these four little verses, but without satisfactorily resolving their meaning. Who were the giants? Who were "the sons of God"? Who were "the daughters of men"? There are two common theories:

a. That the "sons of God" were godly, righteous men of the line of Seth, who married ungodly, wicked women (daughters of men) of the line of Cain, and their offspring were monsters.

b. That the "sons of God" were fallen angels who "left their first estate" (Jude 6), took wives from human women they saw as desirable, and their offspring were giants, 9-to-12 feet tall, and some with genetic deformities.

Things to Consider. In interpreting these four verses, consider the following facts:

- (1). Only Noah's family survived The Flood (no giants, no line of Cain).
- (2). Yet, there were literal giants in Canaan at the time of the Exodus, including the family of Anak (the Anakim), of whom Goliath was a descendant. Some families of giants had 12 fingers and 12 toes. Moses wrote of the huge bed of Og,

³² Having disappeared mysteriously in the very first book of the Bible, we will see what is probably the re-appearance of Enoch as one of the two witnesses of God in Chapter 11 of the Book of Revelation, the very last book of the Bible.

King of Bashan (a kingdom of giants), defeated by Moses in the Exodus (Deuteronomy 3:1-11). His bed was 13 1/2 feet long, six feet wide, and made of iron; it was kept as a memorial in Rabath (northeast Canaan). As recently as the time of Josephus (1st Century AD), there were skeletal remains of such giants on display in Jerusalem.

(3). The Hebrew word translated "giants" in v 4 is "nephalim," meaning "giants, bullies or tyrants"; this word is in turn derived from "naphal" meaning "to fall," clearly suggesting that they were in some way fallen creatures. In the Greek of the Septuagint (about 300 BC) the word is rendered *gigantes* meaning "giants."

(4). Clement of Rome (a disciple of Peter) wrote (about 100 AD) that these giants also became cannibals. Here we can see the probable origins, in Genesis, of traditions of giants in European children's stories (as in Jack and the Beanstalk, in which the giant is a cannibal ("Fe, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman; be he alive or be he dead, I will have him for my bread")). Here may also be the origin of the idea of the mythological gods of the Greeks, who made a practice of taking human wives and lovers.

All things considered, I am inclined to believe the second interpretation, (2). above, and that it occurred both before, and after, The Flood³³. To be considered here is the fact that spirits do not die; therefore fallen spirits would have survived the flood, and it is well known that there were giants in Canaan as recently as the time of David. Why, then, have giants apparently ceased to exist? This question remains unanswered.

26. God Decides to Cleanse the Earth. (6:5-13)

Increasing wickedness causes God to decide to destroy life on the Earth and start again with one righteous family. He does it with an Earth-covering flood. Notice the significance of **violence**; when wickedness reigns, so does promiscuous violence. This relationship is consistent in the Bible, and still is--and God hates it.

27. Noah's Ark: a Ship for Survival. (6:14-22)

The Lord tells Noah to build an ark (a large ship) of "gopher wood," three stories high³⁴. He prescribes exact dimensions, and tells Noah to seal it with pitch, "within and without." He tells Noah that he and his family will enter the ark and be preserved, while the rest of life on the earth is destroyed by a great flood. God tells him that he will also bring into the ark all the air-breathing animals to be preserved, along with a supply of food for all aboard. These are strange words to

³³ For a more thorough consideration of this mystery, see "Two Mysteries in Genesis" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries). See also the study guide to II Peter 2:4-8 and "What Is Hell and Where Is It?" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

³⁴ No one knows what tree produced gopher wood. The Hebrew is little help, but suggests thick bark. My best guess is that the ark was made of oak.

Noah's ears, for there has never been a flood on the Earth--not even a real rain; but Noah says. "Aye, aye, sir!" and goes to work.

NOTES:

a. At this point we must wonder why the ship is called an "ark." Why not call it "Noah's ship," or "Noah's boat"? The English word "ark" is derived from an ancient Germanic word, meaning a vessel or box that protects and preserves, as in the Ark of the Covenant. The Hebrew word simply means "a box-shaped thing, chest or box." The little boat which the mother of Moses made of woven reeds in Egypt, to hide her baby and save his life, is called an ark (Ex 2:3). Noah's Ark was, in essence a very large and stable floating box, with no means of propulsion or steering.

b. The relative dimensions prescribed by God for the ark are in perfect keeping with today's state-of-the-art ship design for a cargo vessel built for stability in rough seas. Even unbelieving ship-building engineers find this interesting.

28. Instructions for Loading the Animals. (7:1-9)

God commands Noah to bring the air-breathing animals into the Ark. There was no need to bring in fish, oysters and other gill-breathing animals, for the flood was no threat to them. Such aquatic creatures did exist at the time, for their fossils have been found in rocks at all elevations, including mountains, many thousands of feet above sea level. This puzzles unbelieving geologists (but makes perfect sense to believing geologists--and to us).

Specific instructions are given concerning loading the animals: Noah is to bring one pair each of unclean (not to be eaten) animals, and seven pairs each of clean (edible) animals³⁵. This disparity in numbers is apparently to provide clean animals for food, for Noah and his family, and food for the carnivores, during and after, the flood.

NOTES:

a. How could all those animals get in the ark? Skeptics and unbelievers hasten to "prove" that the ark could not have been large enough to hold so many animals, since there are many millions of species today. But the Genesis record does not speak of "species"; it speaks of "kinds." Thus, there would have been only one pair of dogs--not a pair of every variation of dogs, one pair of owls--not a pair of every kind of owl, one pair of beetles, etc. And, these pairs of animals need not have been full-grown; young, smaller pairs could have been brought aboard. We need not dissect or attempt to "prove" the point here; suffice it to say that many mathematical, scientifically sound, studies have been done to demonstrate that the

³⁵ Since seven in the Bible is the number meaning completion or perfection, this may simply mean "enough"--that is, a sufficient number.

ark, built to God's specifications, would have held the animals (and the plants) with room to spare.

b. But what about the dinosaurs? Another common attack on the Genesis account has to do with dinosaurs. How, after all, could there have been room for all those huge animals in the ark? To begin with, some dinosaurs were as small as chickens; and, for the very large "kinds," small, young specimens could have been loaded. After all, "dinosaur" is a word that didn't exist prior to 1842; it was coined by Sir Richard Owen, and it simply means, "terrible lizard." Also, it is characteristic of reptiles to continue to grow as long as they live. Again, there will be no attempt here to "prove" the matter; but there are excellent materials on the subject available from scientific apologists such as Dr. Henry Morris and Dr. Kent Hovind. For a summary of evidence for this interesting possibility, see "Dinosaurs and Dragons: What Does the Bible Say?" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

c. Then, what became of the dinosaurs? Scientists today struggle to explain the disappearance of the dinosaurs; the current theory is that a huge asteroid struck the Earth many millions of years ago and killed them all. Even if I were a believing evolutionist, I would call this theory absurd; an asteroid collision large enough to kill all dinosaurs, all over the earth, would necessarily kill everything else, all over the Earth (asteroids are not selective in terms of what they smash); in fact, a collision that monstrous would probably have shattered and destroyed the Earth itself. The most reasonable explanation for all those layers of dinosaur bones all over the Earth, from Kentucky to China, is that they were drowned, and quickly buried in mud during the Genesis flood³⁶. Those that survived the flood on the ark, and their offspring, would have been hunted for food, killed and eaten by predators, etc, until rare or extinct (we may be sure that carnivorous dinosaurs ate on another. And, it is entirely possible that some survive today, especially plant-eaters, deep in unpopulated tropical forests. There have been sightings of such animals reported; and there is an apparently credible report of the killing, and eating, of such an animal by natives in a remote part of Central Africa.

d. The Dragon Connection. As we have just seen (in **b.** above), prior to 1842, the word "dinosaur" did not exist; it will not be found in dictionaries prior to that time, and it appears nowhere in the Bible. Prior to 1842 these often large, fearsome, reptilians were called "dragons"; the words "dragon" and "dragons" occur more than 30 times in the Bible, all in the Old Testament, and in the Book of

³⁶ A famous deposit of dinosaur bones is at Big Bone Lick in Boone County, Kentucky. Thomas Jefferson had some bones from Big Bone Lick in Monticello, his home in Virginia, and was fascinated by them.

*Revelation*³⁷. In the Old Testament "dragon(s)" refers to animals. In Revelation, where it occurs 13 times in the singular, it is always used symbolically of Satan. There is reason to believe that what we call dinosaurs, and what were called dragons prior to 1842, survived at least into the Middle Ages; Saint George may have, indeed, slain a dragon with his lance. In fact, there is reason to believe that some very large reptiles survive today in a few very remote places³⁸.

The case most familiar to the general public is the "Loch Ness Monster." Loch Ness is a lake in the Scottish Highlands, which is 23 miles long and 800 feet deep. Because of the extreme depth, and the fact that the water is very murky, ordinary methods of searching in the water are not effective there. There have been many reported sightings, however, and a few photographs taken, of a large animal with a long, curved neck and small head, swimming on the surface in Loch Ness. It is entirely possible that aquatic dinosaurs (plesiosaurs) survive there.

29. Boarding the Ark: Final Separation. (7:10-16)

Noah and family go aboard and are there seven days before the flood begins, apparently to give them time to adjust and organize within the ship. God Himself closes them in (verse 16), and the symbolism of this is highly significant; as He closes the door, He seals off and isolates the righteous remnant of eight people with which He will re-populate the Earth, from the wicked masses of people all about them, who are about to be destroyed.

NOTE the precision of the dating in verse 11. This kind of detail recurs throughout the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. It seems to be a challenge to the skeptical reader, as if to say, "Go ahead and check me out; when you have the knowledge to do so, you will find that my Word is precisely accurate." This kind of detail in the record, which does not fear minute examination, is **not** to be found in the "holy books" of any of the other religions of the World (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.).

30. The Great Flood. (7:17-24)

A great flood covers the entire Earth, to a depth of 15 cubits (22 1/2 Ft.) above the highest mountains. For 40 days torrential rain, something which has never before occurred, pours from the sky without ceasing. At the same time, "the fountains of the deep" are opened up. The exact meaning of this is not known, but

³⁷ The Hebrew word translated, "dragon," is, without exception, "tannin." It means, "dragon, sea monster, serpent, whale." Most modern translations render the word, "jackal," completely losing its meaning. In Revelation, the Greek word translated "dragon," is, without exception, "drakon," meaning, "dragon, a fabulous kind of serpent."

³⁸ The Komodo Dragon is a very large, carnivorous, lizard thriving today in Indonesia, on the Island of Komodo and three other islands. Although no one is suggesting that they are surviving dinosaurs, they are as much as 10 feet long, weigh as much as 150 pounds, and are definitely at the top of the food chain on those islands. A medieval knight who happened upon one of these and killed it would definitely get credit for slaying a dragon.

it probably means that great aquifers, reservoirs of water under the surface of the Earth, burst upward like enormous artesian wells, forced upward by subterranean pressures. Accompanying the flooding, there were apparently great eruptions of volcanoes, earthquakes, and violent geologic upheavals.

As the waters swirled, churned, boiled and rose, with people and animals struggling and clawing at one another, any floating object, or higher ground, trying in vain to survive, it must have been a scene of horror like no other, before or since. Inside the ark, however, the eight people chosen to perpetuate the human race are safe, comfortable, and probably unaware of the horror around and beneath them, for they were closed inside by God Himself. The flood remained over the Earth for five months ("150 days").

NOTE: *Secular evidence for a universal flood abounds, in archeology, geology and anthropology and in ancient traditions around the world.*

In 1872, a self-taught young genius named George Smith, working among disorganized, dusty, un-deciphered clay tablets and fragments in store rooms at the British Museum, made an amazing discovery. Having been dug up in the great ancient library at Nineveh, and dated midway between the time of The Flood and Abraham, these unread clay tablets were found by Smith to contain repeatedly the expressions, "the flood," "the age before the flood," and "inscriptions of the time before the flood." Twelve of the tablets contain what has come to be called the Gilgamesh Epic. Tablet No. 11 of the 12 tablets of the Gilgamesh Epic, called the "Flood Tablet," contains many details that parallel closely the Genesis account of the pre-Flood world, the Flood and the post-flood settlement of Mesopotamia.

These tablets date from about 3,500 BC, when Shem, Ham, Japheth and their families were still living! Some knowledge of the pre-Flood world, the Flood and the settlement in Mesopotamia was universal, and was then carried from there all over the World as re-population spread.

You may read the story of young Smith and his discoveries in "George Smith and the Gilgamesh Epic" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

31. The Flood Waters Subside. (8:1-14)

After 150 days the flood begins to subside, and the Ark runs aground "upon the mountains of Ararat." The exact location where the Ark came to rest is unknown, although there are some strongly held theories for at least two locations, each supported by evidence and intense, ongoing research. The general location is almost certainly somewhere in the mountains of Armenia, among which the highest is Mount Ararat, at nearly 17,000 feet. Today this is in extreme northeast Turkey. After 2 1/2 months more, the surrounding mountain tops appear, and 40 days later Noah opens the window and releases a raven to see if there is any dry

land about. He then releases a dove for the same reason, but the dove returns. After seven more days, he again releases the dove, which this time returns with an olive leaf. After another seven days, he again releases the dove, and it does not return, having apparently found dry ground. Verse 13 states that in the "six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month," Noah opens the Ark; this will serve both to allow for fresh air, and to provide a view of the surroundings. The surrounding ground is open to the air, but muddy. The ground will not be dry enough to begin debarking for nearly two more months.

DRAFT



And the ark went upon the face of the waters.

Genesis 7:18

NOTES:

a. The Hebrew word here translated "leaf" can also be translated "twig, branch or foliage"; it was probably a tender twig (tip of a stem, with young leaves). Josephus wrote that in his day there were still remains of the ark, which the local inhabitants would show to any who wished to see them, but that reaching them was difficult and dangerous. In one interesting note, he wrote that when the dove returned to the ark with the olive twig, the dove was muddy³⁹. This seems to add a touch of realism to the scriptural account.

b. Here in Chapter 8 is a remarkable example of precise dating. The numbering of the year in verse 13 is not explained, but seems to refer to Noah's age. He was 500 years old when he began to have children (see 5:32), 100 years was about the age of maturity, and by the time of the Flood his three sons were grown and married. Precise detail is a characteristic of the Bible's record, and one unique to the Bible; no other sacred writings of the World's religions can compare with the Bible in this way. I believe that eventually these details of dating will be exactly verified.

32. Unloading the Ark and Building The First Altar. (8:15-22)

Noah unloads the animals from the Ark; they have been in the Ark for one year and 17 days. Noah builds an altar, offers sacrifices to the Lord from the clean animals, and the Lord is pleased. The Lord decides (inwardly) never again to "smite every thing living" for the wickedness of man. This is the first recorded building of an altar to God; earlier ones may have been built but there is no record of it.

33. A Covenant and the Sign of the Rainbow. (9:1-17)

God enters unilaterally into a covenant with man, and with the animals of the earth, never again to destroy the Earth with a flood. He declares that the animals shall fear man, and that they are provided for man's food. As a sign of the covenant, and a reminder to man, God sets the rainbow in the sky.

NOTE: *skeptics scoff at this idea, knowing that rainbows are a simple, natural result of direct sunlight, diffracted (separated by wavelength) by the prismatic effect of water vapor in the air. In fact, you and I can easily create the same effect with a garden hose on a sunny day⁴⁰. So, they say, where is the miracle? The key to understanding this is to remember that before this time rainbows had never been seen, for the Earth had never before been exposed to open, direct sunlight. Prior*

³⁹ Josephus, Antiquities, 1.3.5, 20. 2. 2.

⁴⁰ At Cumberland Falls, in south-central Kentucky, when conditions are right, there is even a "moonbow," created by bright moonlight in the mist of the falls.

to the Great Flood the Earth was enclosed in a perpetual cloud canopy. It was not a miracle, and the Bible doesn't suggest that it was a miracle. It was (and is)



Also He sent forth a dove from Him...

Gen 8:8a

*a perfectly natural phenomenon, but **one that had never before occurred**. God, of course, knew what would happen, once the canopy was depleted by raining, and the sunlight came fully through. Henceforth, this beautiful, perfectly natural, phenomenon functions as a frequent reminder of His promise. And now, about 6,000 years later, rainbows still shine reassuringly in the sky, and there has been no other universal flood.*

34. Noah Drinks Too Much Wine, and Ham Gets in Trouble. (9:18-27)

Noah settles down, plants grape vines and begins to make wine. He drinks too much of it, and goes to sleep naked in his tent. Ham enters the tent, sees his father's condition and tells Shem and Japheth, who cover Noah. Here again is one of those mysterious glimpses in Genesis which raise unanswered questions. What, we must wonder, took place in that tent after Ham blundered, innocently, in; we are told nothing about it. But, as a result, Noah pronounces a negative prophecy, often referred to as "the curse of Ham." Actually, the curse is pronounced on Canaan, Ham's son, which further clouds the story⁴¹.

35. The Death of Noah. (9:28-29)

Noah dies at age 950, having lived 600 years before The Flood, and 350 years after the flood. His place of burial is unknown, but there is a town at the base of Mt. Ararat in Armenia which claims to have his tomb; the town's name means "Here Noah settled." Only God knows.

***NOTE:** The region where the Ark grounded, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, is the location of the headwaters of the Euphrates River. It appears (and would seem natural) that Noah and his family followed the Euphrates southward, back to the Mesopotamian Valley where they had begun. Thus we see his descendants becoming established in the "land of Shinar," and spreading out from there, in all directions, to settle the known World.*

36. The Generations of the Sons of Noah. (Chapter 10)

Chapter 10 contains the genealogy of the descendants of Noah. Considering the pivotal fact that all the people who have ever lived since the Flood are descended from the three sons of Noah--Shem, Ham and Japheth--their offspring are bound to have names that are significant in the history of the Old World. These names, and some of the annotations with their names, are fascinating. Consider the following:

⁴¹ Ham's curse was actually pronounced on Canaan, Ham's youngest son. The curse, being hereditary, would naturally flow through Ham's children; but why the youngest only? There must be more involved here than we know. At any rate, in keeping with the prophecy, the Canaanites were eventually servants of the descendants of both Shem (the Israelites), and Japheth (the Greeks and Romans).

- a. Magog - a significant name in the prophecies of the Books of Ezekiel and Revelation (verses 1-2);
- b. Ashkenaz. Today, Jews are usually divided into two groups: the Ashkenazic, those whose ancestors were Yiddish-speaking Jews of Germany and Eastern Europe; and the Sephardic, those whose ancestors settled in Spain and Portugal, spreading in more recent times into Western Europe, the Mediterranean, and America (verse 3);
- c. The Isles (Places) of the Gentiles (verses 4-5);
- d. Cush and Canaan - Cush was originally NE Mesopotamia, today the name refers to a region in Afghanistan and Kashmir (the Hindu Kush), and another in Northeast Africa (ancient Nubia), today comprising the area of Sudan and Ethiopia⁴². Canaan, Ham's youngest son, provided the name for what is today called the Holy Land, before it was settled by the Israelites (verse 6) ;
- e. Sheba - The ancient land in southern Arabia of the Queen who visited Solomon; today it is believed to be the area of Yemen (verse 7);
- f. Nimrod - This somewhat mysterious man was Ham's grandson, and the most prominent post-Flood leader until the rise of Abraham. He became the founder of a kingdom in the Euphrates Valley, in which were established the first cities built after the flood, including Babel and Nineveh (verses 8-12);
- g. Canaan - He was the father of the Canaanite tribes who peopled the Promised Land before the Exodus and the invasion by Joshua (verses 15-20);
- h. Aram - He was Shem's youngest son, and father of the great Aramaean culture centered in what is today Syria. Their language, Aramaic, was the language of commerce and the common people in the time of Christ; Jesus taught and preached in Aramaic. Parts of two Old Testament books were first written in Aramaic, which is also called Syriac and Chaldee⁴³. (verses 22-23)
NOTE: Among the sons of Aram, the first-born is Uz. The land that he settled, the land of Uz, was the home country of Job, author of the Book of Job (Job 1:1); some students of the Bible believe that the Book of Job is the earliest-written book of the Bible. There is much evidence to argue that the Land of Uz was a large land, between the Jordan River to the west and Arabia to the East, running from the Dead Sea, northward as far as Damascus (see the introduction to the study guide to Job).
- i. Peleg - He was Shem's great-grandson. His name means "division," and what is written about him is intriguing: "...for in his days was the earth divided." This

⁴² If you wonder how Cush could have been the origin of people in such widely separated places, it is apparently because the Cushites at one time conquered **all** of the region from NW Asia to NE Africa.

⁴³ See "Languages of the Bible" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries...).

may refer to the dividing of the people by means of different languages; or it may refer to what geologists call "continental drift," the separation of the continents. (verse 25)⁴⁴.

37. The Tower of Babel. (11:1-9)

Noah's offspring decide to build a great city in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, and a high tower made of bricks and slime (naturally occurring tar or asphalt, or a product made from it, used as mortar). Here again there is mystery, but here the Lord created diversified languages, apparently so that all of mankind could not unite in unwise or wicked projects. Apparently the tower of Babel was the focal point of the problem; and with it unfinished, the Lord confused the people with many different languages, and scattered the different linguistic groups over the known world⁴⁵.

NOTES:

a. In verse 1 the Hebrew is literally "of one lip and one set of words," that is a language of one sounding (phonology) and one set of words (vocabulary). It is highly likely that this was the language spoken before the Great Flood (Hebrew, or a similar Semitic language) because Noah and his family would have, very naturally, brought their language with them. Also, the primitive written records were transmitted through Noah and Shem, apparently in Hebrew or a similar Semitic language.

It is also highly unlikely that either Noah or Shem was involved in this revolt against the will of the LORD. Thus the primitive written records of this rebellion, and the subsequent scattering of linguistic groups, would have been kept by Shem or his descendants, the one group that remained in the Valley of Mesopotamia. All archeological evidence supports this supposition.

b. In verse 2 the words "from the east" are interesting. Perhaps it means that, initially in their migration downstream from Ararat, Noah and his family traveled southward on the east side of the Tigris; thus they would have traveled "from the east" into the Land of Shinar, in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley.

c. The land of Shinar was probably in the Southern part of the Tigris- Euphrates Valley.

d. Note the wording of verse 4, and especially that the words "may reach" are in italics. This means that the words are not actually in the Hebrew text, but were

⁴⁴ Continental drift is a geological theory which posits that the Earth was once solid land, with the seas beneath the land; that in time the surface broke up and land masses drifted apart, forming separate continents. Those who hold to this theory cite as evidence the shapes of adjacent continents, such as the west coast of Africa and the east coast of South America. See in this regard verse 32.

⁴⁵ "Babel" is translated from a Hebrew word meaning "confusion." Thus the unfinished work of ungodly human pride became the "tower of confusion."

added by the translators; therefore, the passage could be read, "...a tower whose top [will be] unto heaven." The passage may mean that the tower was a presumptuous effort to reach GOD's heavenly realm with man's resources; but this is unlikely because ziggurats by their very nature have self-limiting height. On the other hand, it may mean that the top of the tower was a place dedicated to astrology, the study and pagan worship of the heavens (see for example II Kings 23:5). This latter seems to be the more likely explanation.

e. Verses 1-6 are mysterious; but they may be interpreted as God's mighty move to protect man from prideful self-destruction, so soon after the Flood. At any rate, at this point (with the tower unfinished) the Lord created many languages, so that the people could not unite in their wicked purpose (or in any other purpose). The result was a forced migration, into separated groups speaking various languages.

A tower of this kind, with upper floors increasingly smaller than the ones below them, is a structurally sound concept; but it is also one with self-limiting ultimate height. Such structures continued to be built in the following centuries, and are today called ziggurats.

38. The Generations of Shem. (11:10-31)

The remainder of Chapter 11 details the genealogy of Shem, the father of all Semites ("Shemites"), that is, the father of all Jews **and** Arabs⁴⁶. This record brings us to Abram (whose name God will change to Abraham), the ninth generation from Shem, and his nephew, Lot. With Terah, Abram's father, they are living in Ur of the Chaldees, a prominent city in the southern part of the Euphrates Valley. Lot's father, Haran, dies in Ur and Abram seems to assume parental responsibility for Lot⁴⁷.

For reasons not explained, Terah (Abram's father), takes Abram, his barren wife Sarai, and their adopted nephew, Lot, and they migrate northward along the Euphrates River to the city of Haran, on the border of Canaan--the land that will become the Promised Land.

Terah dies at Haran at the age of 205.

From there in Haran, Abram, Sarai and Lot will set forth on their great adventure into the unknown. (11:27-31)

39. Into the Unknown with a Great Promise. (11:32-12:5)

⁴⁶ It is common usage today to use the word "anti-Semitic" to mean anti-Jew. This is **incorrect**, for both Jews and Arabs are Semitic peoples, both descendants of Shem, through the line of Abraham.

⁴⁷ This is the first recorded instance of the adoption of a child by someone not his parent.

In Haran, Terah, Abram's father, dies at age 205⁴⁸. At this point the Lord speaks to Abram, tells him that he is to leave his familiar and secure surroundings and venture off into the unknown land to the south. With this daunting commandment, the Lord gives Abram a three-fold, unconditional promise:

- a. He will bless Abram and make of him a great nation (and Abram will **be** a blessing);
- b. He will bless those who bless Abram, and shall curse those who curse him;
- c. And, in Abram, all the nations of the Earth shall be blessed.

Here is a daunting commandment, and one with mind-boggling promises; yet, there is nothing to indicate that Abram objected to the commandment, or even asked a question about the amazing promises. In a landmark act of faith Abram, at age 75, crosses from Haran into Canaan and sets forth into the unknown. He takes with him Sarai, Lot and his family, all their belongings, and a retinue of servants, in a caravan.

40. Canaan Becomes the Promised Land. (12:6-9)

Abram presses southward into Canaan, which is completely unknown territory, populated by the Canaanite descendants of Ham's youngest son, Canaan. In the plain of Moreh, at Sichem (Shechem), the Lord appears to Abram a second time and makes a promise that will continue to shape World events unto this present time⁴⁹. He tells Abram that He will give to him, and his descendants, the land of Canaan; thus, at this point, the strange, unknown land of the Canaanites becomes the Promised Land. Abram builds an altar at Sichem and worships; then he moves southward to a place east of Bethel, builds another altar, and then continues to migrate southward.

41. Sarai's Beauty Brings Trouble. (12:10-20)

There is a famine in Canaan, Abram takes his family "down to Egypt" in order to survive, and Sarai's beauty becomes a problem. Abram, fearing that the Egyptians will kill him in order to take Sarai for their own, asks her to tell them that she is his sister--not his wife--and she apparently agrees⁵⁰. She must have been a heart-stopping beauty, for she immediately becomes the talk of Egypt, and she was about 70 years old! Word of her beauty reaches Pharaoh, who takes her into his harem; and he pays Abram a very great dowry of livestock and slaves for her. Abram has

⁴⁸ In eight generations after the Flood, life spans have dropped from about 900 years to about 200 years. It seems obvious that ionizing radiation in sunlight and other physiological stresses, unknown in the protective environment before the flood, have taken their toll. Life spans will continue to shorten.

⁴⁹ Sichem was in the vicinity of Mount Gerezim, in what would become Samaria. It is also called Shechem (Genesis 34), Sychar (John 4), and Sychem (Acts 7). This place of God's pivotal promise will become a place famous for its wickedness and bloody violence.

⁵⁰ Actually, Sarai was Abram's half-sister; they had the same father, but not the same mother.

shamefully failed to protect Sarai, but the LORD steps in, afflicts Pharaoh with plagues, protects Sarai, and exposes Abram's deception. Pharaoh, knowing that he has had a close call with the LORD, sends Abram away with Sarai, his party, and all his wealth; and he decrees that all Egyptians shall leave Sarai alone. Pharaoh is glad to get rid of them⁵¹!

42. The Parting of Abram and Lot. (Chapter 13)

Abram and his family move northward into the south of Canaan, return to the altar that he had built between Bethel and Hai (Ai), and worship there⁵². By this time, both Abram and Lot have accumulated much wealth, including vast numbers of livestock, and conflict arises over pasture for them. Abram decides that it is time for them to separate, and gives Lot his choice of the land. Lot chooses the Jordan Valley which, at that time, was lush and green, even around the Dead Sea, and he moves down to Sodom, south of the Dead Sea.

Abram stays in the uplands, and is again visited by the Lord, who reiterates the unconditional promises to Abram that his descendants will be a numberless multitude, and that the Promised Land will be theirs forever. With this, Abram settles in at Hebron, which will become the permanent home and burying place for him and his family, including Isaac, Jacob, and their wives.

NOTE: Today it is difficult to imagine, but in Abram's day the Jordan River Valley was lush and green, even in its lower end, including the region around the Dead Sea. The valley made a natural, and inviting, invasion corridor for the great kings of Syria and "the Land of Shinar" (the Euphrates Valley), all the way into the lush, rich lands around the Dead Sea. This led to domination of the region by the powerful kings to the north, and their making vassal states of the small tribal kingdoms around the Dead Sea. And this was the setting for what is about to follow in the lives of Abram, Lot and their families.

43. Abram Rescues Lot and His Family. (14:1-16)

The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, along with other small tribal kingdoms in the area, have apparently been paying tribute to The King of Shinar (southern Mesopotamia) for 12 years. In the 13th year the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah rebel; and the King of Shinar, with a confederacy of allied lesser kings, invades the Jordan Valley to bring the rebels into line. They meet in battle in the vast salt

⁵¹ Why, do you suppose, did Pharaoh, who had absolute power in Egypt and was probably the most powerful man in the World, not simply take Sarai for his own, confiscate all of Abram's possessions, and either kill him and his entourage, make them slaves, or drive them forth from Egypt with nothing? It can only be that the LORD of Abram and his people was watching over them, keeping his great promise, protecting them and, perhaps, telling Pharaoh what he must do.

⁵² Traditional scholars believe that Hai and Ai are the same. Ai, the only place in the Bible record that is pronounced by spelling it, will become a significant place in the early invasion of Canaan by Joshua (Josh 7- 8).

plain that is now the lower end of the Dead Sea⁵³. Sodom and Gomorah, plus the other tribal kingdoms in the area, are defeated; and the people, including Lot and his family, are carried off toward Mesopotamia with all their possessions. Abram hears of this from a survivor who escaped from the battlefield, and he hastily forms a tiny army made up of only 318 of his servants, essentially a group of militia-type minutemen, not trained soldiers, but able to fight when necessary. For the sake of Lot and his family, Abram pursues the invading horde and overtakes them in northern-most Canaan. Although he is vastly outnumbered by a real army, Abram divides his little army, defeats them in a bold night battle, and rescues the captured people and all their possessions.

NOTE: Abram, the first man to be called a Hebrew (14:13), was actually a Gentile from Ur of the Chaldees. Yet the LORD chose him to be the father of the great Jewish race. The meaning of "Hebrew" in v 13 is "immigrant." Sarai, chosen to be the mother of the Jewish race, was also a Gentile from Ur.

44. Abram Meets the Mysterious Melchizedek. (14:17-24)

On the way back from the battle Abram meets Melchizedek, King of Salem, who comes out of Jerusalem bringing bread and wine for Abram's exhausted soldiers⁵⁴. This mysterious man blesses Abram, praises "the most high God" who has given Abram the victory, and Abram gives 1/10th of the spoils to him (but refuses to accept any of the spoils for himself). The facts that Melchizedek blessed Abram (and not vice versa), and that Abram paid a tithe to him, clearly identify Melchizedek as superior to Abram.

But who was this mysterious man? This is his only appearance in the Bible, although he is referred to in Psalm 110:4, and is clearly described in the Book of Hebrews (Chapters 5-7) as a type of Christ⁵⁵. In fact, he may have been what theologians call a "Christophany," an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ (we will see more about this in Chapters 16, 18 and 22). His name means "King [or Prince] of Peace."

45. A Promise Repeated and a Prophetic Dream. (Chapter 15)

Abram complains to God about having no child and, by his choice of names for God, reminds Him that this provision is not only his promise, but also his

⁵³ Because of more than 4,000 years of silting, the Dead Sea water level is much higher today than it was in Abram's day. The plain where the battle was fought is now under water.

⁵⁴ Salem is a synonym for Jerusalem; the etymology here is obscure but, ironically, the name seems to mean "City of Peace." An Egyptian notice from about 1875 BC seems to refer to it as "Urusalimum"; a Canaanite inscription from about 1350 BC calls it "Urusalim."

⁵⁵ There are several men in the Old Testament whose lives can be thought of as suggesting what the Messiah will be like when He appears at the close of the Old Testament period. Such a man is called a "type of Christ"; examples include Melchizedek, Isaac and David.

responsibility⁵⁶. God again promises numberless descendants, Abram enters into a covenant with God and, in a dream, God tells him in some detail of the future Egyptian captivity and the Exodus. Not only this, but the Lord promises in covenant that the Promised Land will extend all the way from the Egyptian border to the Euphrates River, an area larger than the land that will be seized and settled by Joshua, and vastly larger than present day Israel⁵⁷.

NOTES:

*a. Note the specificity of the prophecy, even to include the fact that the Israelites would leave Egypt with great riches. Today unbelieving, critical scholars teach that such prophetic statements were written into the Bible long after the prophesied events took place, so as to make the prophetic statement **appear** to be supernatural. Why go to so much trouble to discredit a fulfilled prophecy? Their humanistic pride does not allow them to believe in anything supernatural, for that would shine the light of reality on their own inability to explain it, and their pathetically limited knowledge compared to that of our all-knowing God.*

b. We know where the northern boundary (Euphrates River) is; but no one is sure of the location of "the river of Egypt"; it may be the Nile, or it may be an ancient stream bed in southern Sinai.

46. Sarai's Bad Idea. (16:1-6)

After 10 years in Canaan, Sarai is approximately 75, and although still in her reproductive years, she is still unable to conceive⁵⁸. In desperation, believing that she will never conceive, she has a very bad idea: she gives Hagar, her Egyptian servant, to Abram as a second wife. Hagar conceives, and gives in to foolish pride; she now feels superior to Sarai, and doesn't try to hide it. In fact, it appears that she even "rubs it in" and Sarai, already feeling like an ultimate failure, feels even worse. She complains to Abram, he tells her to deal with Hagar as she sees fit, and she punishes Hagar so severely that she runs away into the desert.

47. A Promise to Hagar. (16:7-14)

In the desert, alone and with no preparations for survival, Hagar's outlook is grim. She rests by a well, and is there visited by "**the** angel of the LORD"; he

⁵⁶ Note that here Abram address God as Adonai ["Lord"], reminding Him that He is responsible for being Abram's total provider; and he complains, "You have not given me a child, a foreign servant is my heir, and I have waited a long time for a child of my own, one that you are supposed to give me." For an explanation of the significance of "Adonai" here, see "Notes on the Names of God" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

⁵⁷ In the eyes of God, this makes controversies over the Golan Heights irrelevant and moot, and the Kingdom of Jordan illegitimate (let alone such artificialities as the "West Bank" and the "Gaza Strip").

⁵⁸ Although we marvel that Sarai was still in her childbearing years when she was 75, people lived longer; and the child-bearing period in a woman's life lasted well past the age of 80. By the time that she was 90, and Abram was 100, both were past their reproductive years (Chapter 17). Sarah lived to be 127 and Abraham lived to be 175.

doesn't identify himself, but begins to speak⁵⁹. He tells her that her cries of distress have been heard, that she is to return to Sarai and submit to her authority, and then makes an amazing promise, similar to the promises made to Abram. He tells Hagar that she will produce such a multitude of descendants that they will be beyond counting. He also tells her that she will bear a son, the father of this numberless multitude, and that she is to name him Ishmael ("God hears"). She is also told that the child "will be a wild man," in conflict with those around him. She realizes that she has been visited by God and survived it, and the well was then named Beer-la-hairi ("the well of living after seeing [God]").

NOTES:

a. When "the angel of the Lord" appears in a passage, with the definite article as it does here in v 7, (as opposed to "an angel of the Lord), it usually means an appearance, not of an angel as a created messenger of God, but an appearance of God Himself. This phenomenon is what theologians call a Christophany ("appearance of Christ"), an appearance of the LORD himself, in the person of the pre-incarnate Christ. Some use the term, Theophany ("appearance of God") instead of Christophany, meaning the same thing. Traditional theologians usually capitalize the "C" in Christophany and the "T" in Theophany, out of respect for the words "Khristos" (the Greek word for Christ in the NT) and "Theos" (the Greek word for God in the NT). In this study guide the first letter of each word will be consistently capitalized.

b. At risk of over-generalization, I think it is fair to observe that the prophecy that Ishmael (and by extension his descendants) will be wild and in constant conflict with those around him, is obviously played out before us. Arabs have historically been wild, free-roaming, fierce, emotional, and impulsive. With a strong tendency toward passion and violence, they seem easily moved to maniacal, mindless fury, prone to mob violence, and seem always to be either killing those around them, or killing one another.

48. A Son at Last, and a New Name. (16:15-17:8)

When Abram is 86, Hagar bears him a son and, in obedience to the angel of the Lord, the boy is named Ishmael ("God hears"). For 13 years, Abram seems to think that Ishmael is the son God had promised him--the only one he will ever have. He seems to be satisfied; but when he is 99 the LORD appears to Abram again, renews His promises to Abram, and then changes his name from Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude").

⁵⁹ This angel is probably a Christophany--that is an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ.

NOTE: *At this point Abraham is probably thinking, "Yes, Lord, you have told me these things before, my son is now 13, and things are going along nicely. I like my new name, and I am satisfied." He doesn't realize that God has a better idea that will stagger his mind!*

49. Circumcision--a Covenant Sign. (17:9-14)

As a sign of the everlasting covenant with Abraham and his descendants, the Lord establishes a landmark requirement: all males, in order to be partakers of the covenant, must be circumcised. To fail to do so will mean being "cut off from his people"--banished from both fellowship with God and with his people, and from the benefits of the covenant. The uncircumcised male will become a foreigner, an alien from both God and his people. Nothing could be more serious! Boy babies

are to be circumcised when they are eight days old--not seven days, and not nine days--but eight days old. No exceptions!

NOTE: *Here is another illustration of the supernatural nature of the Scriptures. God knew something that man would not figure out for more than another 4,000 years: that the clotting factors in our blood reach their all-time high on the 8th day after birth. Today most babies are circumcised at about 3 days, because the clotting factors are injected and bleeding is not a problem; but until recent times this commandment of God protected hundreds of millions of boy babies from excessive bleeding, and possible death, when circumcised.*

50. A New Name for Sarai and a Staggering Promise. (17:15-27)

Then the Lord announces another name change: Sarai ("Regal") shall henceforth be called Sarah ("Mother of Princes"). But that's not all. The Lord says that Abraham and Sarah shall have a son, the two of them--in the natural way--that she shall be a mother of nations, and that kings shall come from her. At this point Sarah is 89, and Abraham is 99, and his immediate reaction is to fall on his face laughing! Regaining his self-control, Abraham says, in effect, "Oh, come on now Lord, let's be reasonable. Sarah is too old, I am too old, and Ishmael is doing fine--why not just settle for him⁶⁰?" But the Lord, ignoring Abraham's lapse of faith and decorum, goes on to say that Sarah will indeed bear a son after the normal gestation period, and that his name is to be Isaac ("Laughter"). The covenant will be established through this boy, not Ishmael; but Ishmael shall become the father of 12 princes and his offspring shall become a great nation. With his head still

⁶⁰ Here is a vivid example of the poverty of our human thinking, compared with the wisdom and power of God.

spinning, and with Sarah still unaware of the amazing news, Abraham has himself, Ishmael and all the males in his household circumcised⁶¹. It has been quite a day!

51. The LORD Comes Calling. (18:1-15)

As Abraham takes his ease at his home near Hebron ("in the plains of Mamre"), in the heat of the day, the LORD appears to him in a most unusual way. "Three men" approach his tent, he runs to meet them and falls on his face before them. He makes them comfortable in the shade of an oak tree, brings water to wash their feet, and has food prepared for them, which they eat. One of the 3 men is identified as YHWH Himself; He makes a specific promise about the future birth of the miracle son and the time⁶². Sarah, inside the tent and out of sight, hears what is said and her reaction is similar to Abraham's: she can't believe it and thinks it must be a joke. The LORD, knowing her thoughts, rebukes her for her unbelief⁶³.

52. Abraham Pleads with GOD for Sodom and Gomorrah. (18:16-33)

The unexplained group of "three men" continues, deciding to go down to Sodom, and Abraham goes with them, to be of assistance. There is discussion among them (which Abraham apparently can't hear). YHWH (one of the group--or all of the group???) asks whether Abraham should be told of the approaching doom of Sodom and Gomorrah. The three continue toward Sodom but Abraham does not, and he and the LORD discuss the decision to obliterate the sin-ruined cities. Again we are confused about the identity of the three, and now YHWH is separated from them, talking with Abraham.

The LORD tells Abraham that He has decided to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abraham intercedes. In a remarkable display of boldness (if not outrageous presumption), he bargains with the LORD in an attempt to prevent the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but to no avail, because there are not even 10 righteous men in the two cities combined! It is curtains for Sodom and Gomorrah.

NOTE: *Abraham seems not to have realized that he was speaking to YHWH, for here he addresses Him as "Lord" ("Adonai"), which was a proper way to address God, but was also a proper way to address an angel, or even a human master or superior. For a more thorough explanation of this, see "Notes on the Names of God" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

⁶¹ Things were probably pretty quiet in that group for a week or two.

⁶² This appearance of the LORD seems to be unique, but is unexplained. Are the other two "men" escorting angels? Or is this a unique manifestation of the Trinity? We are left only to marvel and to wonder; but the shifting back and forth from plural to singular and back to plural, and the statement of YHWH Himself in v 13, without explanation, seem to make a case for the visit's being by a manifestation of the Holy Trinity.

⁶³ By this time Sarah has ceased to ovulate (verse 11); she is about 89 years old.

53. Two Angels Come to Sodom and Lot Invites Them to Stay with Him. (19:1-3)

The "three men" and YHWH disappear from the story, and Abraham returns to his tent and Sarah.

Without preamble, the scene shifts to Sodom and the home of Lot.

Two angels come to Sodom in the evening and are met "in the gate" by Lot. In the walled cities of that day, "in the gate" referred to the area around the inside of the gate to the city, where the most important men of the city sat and transacted business. Disputes of all kinds were settled there, and this space was comparable to what became the courthouse steps, or the courthouse door, in traditional American county seats. Lot greets the two angels and bows with his face to the ground. Night is falling, Lot invites them to stay overnight in his home and they politely decline; but he prevails upon them to stay overnight as his guests, and they agree. He makes a feast for the angels and they eat.

54. Maddened Sodomites and Lot's Terrible "Solution." (19:4-8)

Word of two good-looking young strangers in Sodom gets around town quickly, and after dinner the Sodomites ("both old and young") gather around Lot's house. Crazy with lust, they demand to have the visitors sent outside, "that we may know them [carnally]." In an amazingly horrible and disgusting response, Lot offers the mob his two virgin daughters instead! This **unimaginably despicable** fatherhood is difficult to believe! It staggers the mind! No wonder this dysfunctional family gave rise to two wicked nations (Moab and Ammon) that were cursed by God as hopelessly corrupt!

NOTE: The only comparable event in the Bible is an almost identical situation in Judges 19; that one is so abominable that I don't want to think about it!

55. Some Insight Into Sodomy. (19:9-11)

Lot's daughters are safe (no thanks to their father), because the Sodomites aren't interested in virgin girls. Instead, in their lust and fury they attempt to rape Lot, and the angels rescue him. In a vivid illustration of the compulsive madness of sodomy the Sodomites, these who are struck blind by the power of God, are **still** groping around, stumbling over one another, clawing at the door, wanting those two handsome men⁶⁴! Male homosexuals tend to be extremely promiscuous, and can be irrationally driven by lust in the perverted things they do (but let's not think about those things!).

⁶⁴ The only vivid illustrations of this scene that I have seen (and, in fact, the only such illustrations I have ever seen) are in the publications of Jack Chick, Chick Publications, Ontario, California. I don't agree with everything Chick has published, but I recommend these because, for those of us who are not sodomites, such madness is difficult to imagine.

56. The Fiery End of Sodom and Gomorrah. (19:12-29)

Lot and his family fail to see the urgency and the danger; they are reluctant to leave, and his 2 sons-in-law refuse to leave⁶⁵. The angels virtually drag Lot and family out of the doomed city, and they make it to Zoar; Lot must have been a real city boy, afraid of the wilderness, for even a small town (Zoar) was better to him than the great outdoors. The angels warn Lot and family not to look back, and Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed by a heavenly firestorm; but Lot's wife still hasn't caught on--she looks back and is turned to a pillar of salt. And God did all this for Lot and his family, not because they were righteous, but to please Abraham.

NOTE: Abraham had a regular time and place to go before the Lord in prayer (verse 27)--that's a good idea for all of us.

57. Lot's Daughters and a Bad Idea. (19:30-38)

Lot, who went to the town of Zoar because he was afraid to go to the wilderness, is afraid to stay in Zoar, and he finally takes to the wilderness--I can find very little to admire in Lot.

Isolated in the wilderness, living in a cave, and seeing no hope for marriage, Lot's elder daughter has a really bad idea; she suggests that she and her sister get their father drunk enough that he won't realize what is happening, and conceive children by him. They do it, and the result will be 2 sons, who will become the fathers of 2 pagan nations, Moab and Ammon, permanently cursed by God.

58. Sarah's Beauty Causes Trouble Again! (Chapter 20)

Abraham moves farther into the south, to Gerar, a city state in the extreme southern area of Philistia, near the Egyptian border. Beautiful Sarah catches the eye of another king, Abimelech of Gerar. Abraham tells the king she is his sister (Sarah says the same thing), and King Abimelech takes her for his wife. Here we go again! But once more God steps in; like Pharaoh before him, Abimelech hears from God and is terrified. When he confronts Abraham with his deception, Abraham reveals that she is actually his half-sister ("...the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother..."). Abimelech rebukes Abraham (and Sarah) for the deception. Abimelech's wife and his maid servants had been rendered by God unable to conceive; but Abraham prays for Abimelech and his household. and the wife and maid servants are again able to conceive. Abraham leaves, loaded down with valuable gifts from Abimelech.

NOTES:

⁶⁵ These two men, perhaps homosexuals themselves, were apparently "married" to Lot's daughters only in the sense that they were engaged, for Lot's daughters were still virgins (verse 8). The Hebrew word translated "married" also means "betrothed" (and a wide range of other meanings, having to do with possession).

a. In the first 6 verses of Chapter 20 there seems to be revealed a key to the mystery of how the LORD protects his own when their wills are actually in opposition to his will. He will not directly override our wills; but He can orchestrate circumstances so that we are protected from terrible error in spite of our bad decisions.

b. The passage does not tell us how much time has passed since the Lord's recent visit to Abraham and Sarah, but it has probably been not much. At any rate, Sarah was about 89 when Abimelech took her, and she was past her child-bearing years. This makes her remarkable beauty even more amazing, if not supernatural!

c. For Israelites to marry sisters or half-sisters was not proscribed by God until the writing of Leviticus (Leviticus 18:9), about 1450 BC. Having multiple wives was allowed under the Old Covenant, and just how and when it ceased to be practiced is unclear. Jesus' teaching about divorce (Matthew 19:8,9; Mark 10:11,12; Luke 16:18), and Paul's qualifications of elders and deacons (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), plus his complaint about his right to "a wife" (I Corinthians 9:5) clearly suggest monogamy. Even these passages are open to other interpretations, but the case for New Testament monogamy seems to be made sure by the fact that in it there are many examples of monogamy, but not a single case of polygamy; the same is true of the writings of the Ante-Nicene fathers.

59. A Miracle Baby for Sarah. (21:1-8)

As God has promised, Sarah conceives miraculously, and bears Isaac (his name means "Laughter"). By this time she is 90, Abraham is 100, and Ishmael is about 14. On the 8th day Abraham circumcises the baby, and Sarah nurses him until he is weaned, at which point there is a great celebration.

NOTE: *Sarah's body chemistry has been completely restored to the reproductive state (normal hormone balance, menstrual cycles, etc). It is interesting that all this was "supernaturally natural"; she even nursed the baby herself (and in those days children were nursed for about 3-5 years). God could have simply spoken Isaac into being, and then provided wet nurses to nurse him; but He chose to do it this way.*

60. The Casting Out of Hagar and Ishmael. (21:9-14)

By this time, Ishmael is between 15 and 19 years old, and he should have realized that his position in the family has been radically changed, and not for the better. He should have done all he could to please Abraham and Sarah, but he allows his bad judgment to get him, and his mother, in trouble. At about the time that Isaac is weaned, Ishmael says or does something in a disrespectful, mocking way, and Sarah sees him--catches him in the act. She has finally had all of Hagar and Ishmael she is going to take, and she demands that Abraham send them away.

Abraham is extremely reluctant to do this, but God speaks to him about the situation, tells him to go ahead with it, and gives him reassurance that it will be alright. So Abraham gives Hagar and Ishmael food and water, and sends them away into the southern desert⁶⁶.

NOTE that Abraham loves Ishmael (and, it seems, he loves Hagar--see verses 11 and 12); but he submits to God's will.

61. The Rescue of Hagar and Ishmael. (21:15-21)

Hagar and Ishmael wander in the desert near Beersheba until they use all of their food and water supply, and their situation becomes desperate. Facing imminent death from thirst, Hagar places Ishmael in the shade of some shrubs, goes far enough away that she will not have to see him die, and sits down, grieving, to die herself. But the angel of God speaks to her, opens her eyes to the presence of a well, and rescues Hagar and Ishmael; He also repeats His promise to make a great nation of Ishmael's offspring⁶⁷. Ishmael grows up in the desert ("the wilderness of Paran"), becomes a mighty archer, and Hagar finds a wife for him "out of the land of Egypt⁶⁸." Perhaps she found Ishmael's wife from among her relatives; remember that they are on the Egyptian border, and that Hagar is herself an Egyptian.

NOTE: The rest of Chapter 21 tells of a well Abraham has dug in the southern desert, one which Abimelech's herdsmen have seized for themselves. Abraham complains to Abimelech, and they enter into a covenant, solemnized by the giving of seven ewe lambs, thus making the well the permanent property of Abraham. He names the well "Beersheba" ("Well of the Seven") and plants palm trees around it. This is the beginning of the landmark oasis of Beersheba, which will become the southern extremity of the Promised Land.

62. Abraham Climbs Mount Moriah. (22:1-19)

God puts Abraham's faith to the supreme test--and what a test! This is one of my very favorite events in the Bible, and it fairly drips with symbolism concerning the coming Messiah.

Abraham is told to travel for three days to a place where he has never been, to climb a hill there (Mount Moriah), and there to kill Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering to God. Abraham loads the necessary materials and moves out, with Isaac and two servants. The third day, while still at a distance, Abraham leaves

⁶⁶ See in this regard Galatians 4:30.

⁶⁷ Here is another clear example of a Christophany (or Theophany), for "the" angel of God speaks to her as God Himself, in the first person. The well was apparently supernaturally provided, for in that desert water was so precious that wells were few, well known (often named), and fought over

⁶⁸ The wilderness of Paran was in the south-central part of the wilderness area of Sinai (the Sinai desert), bordering the Arabah, the Gulf of Aqabah and Egypt.

the servants, saying that he "and the lad" will go worship and return⁶⁹. He then proceeds with Isaac to the rocky hilltop, with Isaac carrying the wood. As they climb the hill, Isaac observes that they have everything they will need for the sacrifice, except the lamb; and Abraham replies, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb." At the top of Mount Moriah, Abraham builds a crude altar of stones, lays a fire, binds Isaac and lays him on the prepared fire; if Isaac had been wondering about the lamb, he now knows that he is it! Yet, in perfect submission, as a type of Christ, like a sacrifice lamb "he opened not his mouth"⁷⁰. As Abraham prepares to cut Isaac's throat, **the** angel of the Lord (another Theophany) stops him, and says that Abraham has passed the test. At that point a ram appears, tangled by its horns in a thicket of shrubs; Abraham unties Isaac, kills the ram, and lights the fire. Abraham calls the place "YAHWEH (JEHOVAH) Jireh" (the LORD hath seen)⁷¹. The LORD (it was He all along) congratulates Abraham, and repeats the covenant promise for him and his offspring. Abraham and Isaac return to the campsite, rejoin the servants, and they all return to Beersheba.

NOTES:

a. In verse 1 it is written that, "God did tempt Abraham"; it is important to note that the Hebrew word translated "tempt" is "nacah," and its primary meaning is to test, or submit to a trial. We can know that the word cannot mean to entice to do evil (the usual meaning of the word in English), for "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:13). No, as the rest of the text makes clear, it means that Abraham's faith in God was put to the ultimate test--and he passed it gloriously.

b. God seems deliberately to have made it difficult for Abraham to obey (note verse 2, "thine only son, whom thou lovest").

*c. Abraham believed that, no matter what he had to do, Isaac would somehow not be lost to him (verse 5, "I **and the lad** will...come again to you." See also in this regard Hebrews 11:17-19).*

d. As Abraham and Isaac climb the mountain, Isaac is required to carry the huge bundle of firewood on his shoulder, even as Jesus, the Lamb of God, will be forced to climb the hill of Calvary, carrying on his shoulder the wooden means of his being sacrificed, 1,800 years later.

⁶⁹ The Hebrew word translated "lad" here can mean a boy of any age, from infancy to young adulthood. At this time Isaac was at least 15 or 16; Josephus wrote that he was 25 (Antiquities 1:13:2).

⁷⁰ Isaiah 53:7.

⁷¹ Today this descriptive name of God is usually rendered "the LORD who provides": but the primary meaning, the LORD who sees, clearly implies that our God sees our need and is then moved to supply that need. Michael Card, in his classic song, "El Shaddai," wrote, "To the outcast on her knees, He is the God who really sees...." Michael understood it.

e. During the preparation for his being sacrificed, Isaac makes no struggle, nor does he speak a single word (see Isaiah 53:7 and Matthew 27:13,14).

*f. The substitute sacrifice for Isaac is a **ram**, a mature sheep or goat with horns, and not a lamb. When Abraham says that, "God will provide Himself a lamb" he is speaking prophetically of the Messiah to come, the Lamb of God, looking across 1,800 years into the future (although he probably doesn't know it).*

DRAFT



And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

Genesis 22:10

g. According to unbroken Jewish tradition, the spot on Mount Moriah where Abraham built his altar and prepared to sacrifice Isaac is the same spot where, 1,000 years later, David would buy the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, build an altar and offer a sacrifice to stop the killing by the death angel. And on the same spot, soon after that, the altar of burnt offering would be placed in Solomon's Temple; and, 1,000 years after that, the altar of burnt offering in Herod's restored Temple would be placed there--all of this on the very same spot where Abraham offered Isaac. Jesus, the ultimate Sacrifice Lamb, would not be sacrificed there for, since he would be unclean, carrying all our sins, it would be necessary for him to be sacrificed "outside the camp," on nearby Mount Calvary.

63. Isaac's Cousin, Rebekah. (22:20-24)

The last five verses in this chapter are the record of the lineage of Rebekah, granddaughter of Abraham's brother, Nahor. This makes Rebekah Isaac's second cousin; and she will soon be Isaac's wife.

64. Sarah's Death. (Chapter 23)

Sarah dies at age 127; by this time, Isaac is about 37, and Ishmael is about 51. She is buried in Hebron, in a cave purchased by Abraham from Ephron the Hittite. In the gate of the city, Abraham and Ephron, the owner, go through the formalities of an Asian business deal, witnessed by the sons of the owner; and Abraham buys the field containing trees, and a cave for his family's burying place. Abraham will later be buried here with Sarah, as will Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah⁷².

65. A Wife for Isaac. (24:1-9)

Abraham sends a servant back to Haran in the far north, from where he had first entered Canaan, to the village of Nahor, his brother, to find a wife for Isaac; this man is his most trusted servant, and one with authority to act in Abraham's name⁷³. Abraham makes the servant swear not to bring back a Canaanite girl for Isaac, but to bring one of his own, God-blessed kin; and the oath is made in an ancient Oriental way, one which emphasizes the solemnity of the oath, and the importance of its being kept⁷⁴. Abraham also makes it clear that if the girl will not come back

⁷² Jacob's other wife, Rachel, died earlier delivering her son, Benjamin, and was buried by Jacob in a special grave on the road to Bethlehem.

⁷³ Nahor was in Upper Mesopotamia, south of Haran, near the border with Canaan. Both Abraham and Rebekah (Jacob's wife) sent there to obtain wives for their sons.

⁷⁴ The manner of swearing is interesting. Touching the thigh was considered a highly personal and significant act (perhaps because of the nearness of the pelvic region); in the ancient Orient, it was a thing not to be done casually. This seems to have had the purpose of making the promise extremely solemn, and absolutely binding upon the one being sworn. Jacob, at the end of his life, will require this of Joseph concerning his burial place (47:29).

with the servant to Hebron, he is **definitely not** to take Isaac to her; the importance of this is emphatically expressed, but is not explained.

66. The Supernatural Selection of Rebekah. (24:10-28)

Abraham's servant loads 10 camels with supplies for the trip, and gifts for the relatives, and sets out with servants in a caravan for Nahor, in Mesopotamia. Arriving at a well outside the gate at Nahor, he asks the Lord for a specific sign concerning which girl he is to choose, and the Lord immediately grants his request. Rebekah appears, is identified according to the sign, and the servant gives her earrings and bracelets of gold. Rebekah, excited, runs to tell her mother what is happening.

67. Laban Enters the Scene. (24:29-54)

Rebekah's brother, Laban, enters the scene. Apparently acting for his father, he goes out to the well to see what is going on with his sister; satisfied with what he hears, he invites Abraham's servant and his party to enter their home. In verses 34-49 Abraham's servant tells in detail of his mission, and of his encounter with Rebekah at the well. Then Bethuel, Rebekah's father, and her brother Laban, agree that the choice of Rebekah is from the LORD, and give their approval. The servant rejoices, worships the LORD, and presents gifts to Rebekah, her mother, and Laban. Then he and his party are fed, and they spend the night.

NOTE: In all this, Laban seems to play a major role, acting for his father. It may be that Bethuel was old and/or infirm, and unable fully to carry out his role as head of the house. We shall see much more of this Laban, for he will become the scheming father-in-law to Jacob, Isaac's son.

68. Rebekah Becomes Isaac's Wife. (24:55-67)

It is interesting that, although her father and Laban have already consented to give Rebekah to Isaac, they still allow her to make the final choice. She agrees to go, and to become Isaac's wife, and the caravan departs for Hebron, with Rebekah attended by a nurse and female servants. Upon arriving at Hebron, the servant reports to Isaac, who gladly accepts her as his wife. The newlyweds move into the tent that had been Sarah's, Isaac loves Rebekah, and she comforts him in the death of his mother.

NOTES:

a. The farewell blessing of Rebekah by her family in verse 60 seems to be prophetic.

b. There must have been some sort of wedding for Isaac and Rebekah, but there is no mention of it in the passage Ps69. Abraham's Latter Years. (25:1-11)

Abraham is remarried sometime after age 137 to a woman named Keturah and has 6 more children, including Midian, who will become father of the tribe and

nation of Midian⁷⁵. Abraham clarifies the inheritance of his children by making the Isaac his primary heir and sending his children by concubines away, eastward across the Jordan, with gifts and treasures for establishing themselves. At the age of 175 Abraham dies and is buried with Sarah in the cave of Machpelah, by Isaac and Ishmael. Abraham has lived to see his grandson, Jacob's, birth and early childhood. After Abraham's death, Isaac continues to live in the south, near the well at La-hai-roi.

NOTE: *Abraham is buried by Isaac **and Ishmael**; it appears that Abraham has continued to have a positive relationship with Ishmael throughout his life (and, it is reasonable to assume, with Hagar).*

70. Ishmael's Latter Years. (25:12-18)

In fulfillment of the promise of the LORD to Abraham (17:20), Ishmael, father of all Arabs, becomes the father of 12 sons, each of whom will become the prince of one of the original 12 tribes of Arabia. By the end of Ishmael's life his descendants have multiplied and occupy the Arabian Peninsula, from the border with Egypt to the Euphrates River. After a prosperous life among his people, Ishmael dies at age 137; his place of burial is not stated.

NOTE: *This is an interesting parallel to the life of Ishmael's nephew Jacob, who will, one generation after Ishmael, become the father of 12 sons, each of whom will become the founder and prince of one of the 12 tribes of Israel.*

71. The Birth of Esau and Jacob. (25:19-28)

Rebekah is barren, Isaac prays for her for 19 years, and she finally conceives (he will be 60 when the babies are born). She goes before the Lord and asks why there is so much activity in her womb; the Lord tells her that she is carrying twin boys, that each will be the father of a nation, and that "the elder shall serve the younger." Verse 23 is prophetic, and this will lead to trouble in the future. The first-born, who is of a ruddy complexion and hairy, is named Esau ("hairy") and the second is named Jacob ("cheater" or "supplanter"). Esau is born first, but just barely; and Jacob, emerging right behind him, is born holding on to Esau's heel. This grasping of Esau's heel seems to symbolize Jacob's struggle to be superior, in which eventually he will succeed. Esau becomes a rugged outdoorsman and his father's favorite; Jacob is very different ("a plain man, dwelling in tents"), and he becomes his mother's favorite.

NOTE: *In verse 20, both Bethuel, Rebekah's father, and Laban, her brother, are identified as Syrians. This cannot mean that they were ethnic Syrians, for*

⁷⁵ Moses will spend his 40 years of exile in the land of Midian, where he will marry Zipporah, a Midianite maiden, daughter of Jethro, a priest/prince of Midian. Jethro will spend some or all of the 40 years of the Exodus wandering with Moses, and will become a valuable advisor to him.

Abraham had gone to great lengths to avoid Isaac's taking a pagan wife, and Bethuel is the son of Abraham's brother. They are here referred to as Syrians because of where they lived. Even Jacob is called a Syrian in Deuteronomy 26:5, and for the same reason (he had lived there, with Laban, for many years).

72. Esau Sells His Birthright. (25:29-34)

The twin boys grow up to be very different, and Esau seems inclined to being impulsive and short-sighted. Ever the outdoorsman, he comes in from a period in the wilderness to find his brother just finishing the cooking of "a mess of pottage"⁷⁶. Esau is tired and hungry, and asks for some of the pottage; and Jacob, ever the sharp trader, offers to feed him in exchange for his birthright. In a landmark moment of carnal short-sightedness, one that will change the course of history to this day and beyond, Esau agrees to sell his birthright for the food. Jacob makes him seal the deal with a solemn oath and serves up a meal, complete with bread and drink. Esau, his appetite sated, and apparently still satisfied with the deal, goes on about his business. This is difficult to comprehend, even in one apparently not given to much deep reflection, for the birthright of a man as rich as Isaac was worth a very great fortune. Verse 34 tells us that what tempted Esau so was lentil soup (it's good--but not **that** good!).

***NOTE:** Verse 30 tells us that because lentils, when cooked, have a reddish color, this is the origin of the alternate name, Edom, given to Esau ("Edom" is "red" in Hebrew). Red is also associated with Esau in that he had a ruddy, reddish complexion, and in that the sandstone in what became the land of Edom is pink-to-red in color, made famous in the city of Petra.*

73. Isaac Flees Famine and Repeats His Father's Deception. (26:1-11)

Another famine occurs, as in the time of Abraham, but God tells Isaac not to go "down into Egypt" as his father had done. Instead of Egypt, Isaac is told to move into the realm of the Philistine King, Abimelech, to the city of Gerar. Gerar was a wealthy city-state on the spice trade route in southern Philistia, on the Gerar River, near the border with Egypt. In a replay of his father's deception a generation earlier, he tells Abimelech that Rebekah is his sister in order to protect himself (she is actually a cousin). Abimelech, who must have feared God, took them in, but later sees Isaac "sporting" with Rebekah⁷⁷. He realizes that she is definitely not Isaac's sister, learns that she is his wife, and rebukes Isaac for his deception. Although the passage does not make it clear, this Abimelech was probably the son

⁷⁶ "Pottage" is translated from a Hebrew word meaning anything cooked by boiling in a pot. "Mess" means an adequate portion, and may have meant here the entire pot. From this we derive the military terms, mess, mess hall, mess officer, mess decks, etc.

⁷⁷ Today, this Hebrew word might be rendered "playful caressing"--or, in the more contemporary vernacular, "messaging around."

of the King Abimelech whom Abraham had deceived a generation earlier⁷⁸. If he was the same one, he must have been thinking, "These lying Hebrews with their beautiful wives will be the death of me yet!"

74. Isaac Moves Away and Prospers. (26:12-25)

Isaac moves his family away from Abimelech, southward, still in the fertile valley of the Gerar River, and prospers greatly under God's blessing. He grows grain and reaps great harvests, and his herds multiply. He re-opens the wells his father had originally dug (and which the Philistines had filled with dirt). Water was so important in that time and place that wells were given names; and Isaac remembers the names that Abraham had given to the wells, and calls them by the same names.

75. Isaac Re-establishes Beersheba. (26:26-33)

As in Abraham's time, there is conflict with Abimelech's herdsmen over the well at Beersheba. Having been shown in some way that Isaac and his people are under the protection of the LORD, Abimelech visits Isaac to make peace. In what appears to be a replay of the covenant with Abraham a generation earlier, Isaac, with a symbolic feast, makes a covenant with Abimelech, establishing Beersheba as his own.

NOTES:

a. Abimelech and his top assistants knew the name of the true God, YHWH (v28); and, unlike us, they even knew how to pronounce it.

b. Beersheba will grow to be a city, and one which will become a metaphor for the southern extremity of the Land of Israel, as Dan will come to be for the northern extremity. Thus, in later times, the expression, "from Dan even unto Beersheba," meaning all of Israel--from one end to the other.

76. Esau Chooses Pagan Wives. (26:34,35)

Turning his life downhill toward the establishment of the pagan nation of Edom, Esau chooses two pagan wives. He is 40 years old now, Isaac's heir apparent, and his bad choices cause Isaac and Rebekah to grieve. (And things will get even worse with his next choices of wives!).

77. Rebekah Has a Plan. (27:1-17)

At the end of his life, Isaac has become blind; and, sensing that he hasn't many more days to live, he calls Esau and speaks with him. He asks Esau to kill a deer, prepare his favorite venison dish, and bring it to him. This is to be a celebratory

⁷⁸Because of the striking similarity of this passage to Abraham's previous experience (Chapter 20), some critical scholars believe that this passage is just a distorted re-telling of the events of Chapter 20, thus in error. However, the context of Chapter 26 seems clearly to speak of a subsequent time, and the wording of verses 3-5 and 15-18 makes it very clear that this is an experience of Isaac, a generation after his father's similar experience.

meal, a "once more for old times' sake" sort of thing, to be climaxed with the blessing of Esau as the first-born son. Rebekah overhears the conversation, and immediately forms a plan of her own; she will prepare such a dish herself, and trick Isaac into giving Esau's blessing to Jacob. She will also have Jacob wear Esau's garments so he will smell like Esau, and she will put skins of very young goats (kids) on his hands on his hands and his neck so he will feel hairy like Esau, to his blind father.

78. Jacob Steals the Blessing. (27:18-33)

Disguised as Esau, and carrying Isaac's favorite dish (only made of kid [young goat] instead of venison), Jacob appears before his father and tells him that he is Esau. Isaac is suspicious because he recognizes Jacob's voice; nevertheless, after feeling the goat hair on Jacob's hands and smelling the garments, he is satisfied. He enjoys the feast that Rebekah has prepared, and then pronounces upon Jacob the blessing of the first-born. From the wording of the blessing, it seems that Isaac is passing down to his son the same blessing that Abraham had received from the Lord. Very soon, Esau arrives with the venison dish that he has prepared, and the deception is discovered. Isaac is greatly upset, but the blessing of Jacob cannot be taken back.

***NOTE:** In all this dishonesty and elaborate deception, it seems that Rebekah was the instrument of the will of God; otherwise, the patriarchal genetic line that produced the Messiah would have been "Abraham, Isaac and Esau," rather than "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Perhaps she simply realized that Esau had become a carnal, short-sighted, self-centered man; or, perhaps she remembered the prophecy given her by the Lord as the two babies "struggled in her womb" (see 25:22-23). Perhaps both thoughts were in her mind. At any rate, the success of their deception was necessary to the success of the Messianic line.*

79. Esau's (Secondary) Blessing. (27:34-40)

Esau is stricken with grief and anger because Jacob has stolen his blessing, and he asks his father for one of his own. Isaac does bless him with a prophecy about the land and the people he will rule. The land will be fertile and Esau's people (the Edomites) will be warriors; regrettably, however, those warrior people will be the enemies of Israel, not friends.

80. Esau Vows to Kill Jacob. (27:41-46)

Esau vows to kill Jacob after Isaac's death and the end of the mourning period (he was going to murder him, but do it with restraint and civility). Rebekah hears of it and tells Jacob to flee to Haran and stay with her brother, Laban, until Esau calms down. To justify her plan with Isaac, she tells him that she is sending Jacob all the way back to Haran so that he, like his father, can find a proper wife there.

NOTE: When Rebekah uses the expression, "daughters of Heth" in verse 46, she is speaking figuratively, meaning Hittites. Heth, son of Canaan, was father of the Hittite people. His name means "terrible."

NOTE: Highlight numbers have been advanced one number to this point.

80. Jacob Seeks a Wife, and Esau Rebels. (28:1-9)

Isaac agrees with Rebekah's reasoning and sends Jacob to the home of his uncle, Laban, to find a wife among his relatives in Haran; and, in sending him off, Isaac also blesses him⁷⁹. Esau, learning of all this, and offended, decides to rebel. Apparently wishing to make a negative statement and to spite his parents, he marries a daughter of his uncle, Ishmael.

Note: In verse five Laban, Rebekah's brother, is referred to as "Laban...the Syrian." He is, of course, not a Syrian; this merely refers to the location of his home on the Syria/Canaan border.

81. "Climbing Jacob's Ladder." (28:10-22)

On his journey to Haran to find a wife, Jacob stops to spend the night and makes a strange choice for a pillow: to rest his head, he chooses a certain rock. That night he dreams of a ladder which reaches from that spot to Heaven, with angels ascending and descending, and the LORD Himself speaks to him from above the ladder, repeating the promise made to Abraham and passing it on to Jacob. Jacob believes that the place where he is must be the very house of God and the gateway to Heaven. He builds a rock monument, capped with his "pillow" stone, names the place Bethel ("house of God"), and promises to tithe.

NOTE: There is a stone in Scotland that a completely unfounded **tradition** identifies as the stone Jacob used for his pillow. It is a block of sandstone, concave on the top so as to make a place to sit. For centuries it was kept at Scone in Scotland (thus the name "Stone of Scone") and Scottish kings sat on it for coronation. In 1296 it was captured by the English king and taken to Westminster Abbey, where it was placed in a chair (the "Coronation Chair") where it was used for many centuries for the same purpose. In 1950 the stone was stolen by a group of Scots and returned to Scotland. After a period of conflict it was decided to keep the stone in Edinburgh Castle, where it now resides except when needed in Westminster Abbey for the coronation of British monarchs. Only God knows the true origin of the Stone of Scone.

82. Jacob Meets Rachel. (29:1-14)

⁷⁹ Remember that Abraham sent a servant to find an appropriate wife for Isaac; in this case, Isaac sends Jacob himself, perhaps to marry a proper girl, **and** to get him away from Esau.

Leaving Bethel, Jacob travels on to the border land of Syria, where he encounters a group of Laban's herdsmen gathered at a well. Soon Laban's daughter, Rachel, arrives at the well with a flock of sheep; Jacob introduces himself, and seems to be immediately smitten with her beauty. Rachel also seems excited; she runs back to Laban, who welcomes Jacob, and Jacob stays with him for a month. And this month is only the beginning of a very long visit with Laban and his family.

NOTE: As we have seen, and will see many times more, the expressions, "son of" and "daughter of" are often used to mean "descendant of" and not necessarily the offspring of. In verse five Laban is called by Jacob "the son of Nahor"; but Laban was actually the grandson of Nahor, and the son of Bethuel.

83. "Surprise, Surprise!"--The Wrong Wife. (29:15-26)

Jacob volunteers to work seven years for Laban, as the price for marrying Rachel. At the end of the seven years Jacob claims Rachel, but Laban tricks him into marrying her older sister, Leah. In the morning, apparently with the marriage consummated, when Jacob sees her, he realizes that he has married Leah! He complains to Laban, who justifies his deception by saying that he cannot give the younger daughter in marriage until the elder is married. It is generally believed today that Laban was dishonest here, for no such law or custom is known; but Jacob believes him.

NOTE: Today it is really hard to imagine how Jacob could not have known until the next day that he had married the wrong girl. There must have been total darkness and absolute silence--no romance, and no pillow talk. It helps to remember that all Jacob had seen of Rachel was her face, and that, in general, women were basically possessions in that time and place. However, in spite of all the possible explanations, the thought that he could not have known until the next day that he had married the wrong girl still seems really bizarre!

84. Jacob Finally Gets to Marry Rachel. (29:27-35)

Laban makes another deal with Jacob: he must work another 7 years ("fulfil her week") in order to marry Rachel⁸⁰. Jacob agrees to work for Laban 7 more years for Rachel. He finally gets to marry Rachel, and continues to work for Laban. Leah begins to bear sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, the first 4 patriarchs of the 12 tribes; Rachel, however, is barren.

NOTE: The wording of the passage is unclear. "Fulfill her week" can mean a period of seven days, or a period of seven years. Some commentators believe that Jacob had to work seven years before marrying Leah, and then seven more years

⁸⁰ Here, in verse 27, we possibly encounter the first use of "week" to mean 7 years (not days). This idiom becomes important in interpreting the "last days" prophecies of Daniel and the other Old Testament prophets, and the prophecies in the Book of Revelation.

before being allowed to marry Rachel. Others believe that Jacob was allowed to marry Rachel seven days after marrying Leah, and then had to work the seven additional years while already married to her; the wording of verse 30 suggests this interpretation. This would make for a short honeymoon with Leah, but perhaps no more was in order.

85. Rachel's Bad Idea. (30:1-8)

Rachel gets the same bad idea that Sarah had concerning her slave girl Hagar; she gives Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, as a concubine. If Bilhah conceives, the child will be at least symbolically Rachel's, and she thinks that will be better than nothing. Jacob, "just wanting to be cooperative," complies. As a result, Bilhah produces Dan and Naphtali, the 5th and 6th patriarchs of the 12 tribes.

86. Leah Has the Same Bad Idea. (30:9-13)

Now Leah ceases to conceive; and she, following the family's carnal tradition, gives her slave girl, Zilpah, to Jacob. Jacob, again complies, and 2 more patriarchs, Gad and Asher, the 7th and 8th, are born.

87. The Strange Affair of the Mandrakes. (30:14-16)

There are some strange goings on here! It appears that Rachel is in charge of Jacob's sleeping arrangements, and that poor Leah has to bargain with her to get a night with Jacob. Not only that, but Leah also has to explain it to Jacob to convince him to spend a night with her; the poor woman seems to have lived with a lot of rejection from her husband.

And there are mandrakes involved; young Reuben, now old enough to roam around in the wheat fields, finds some of the mandrake plants and brings them to Leah. With a little imagination the fleshy, forked, mandrake roots bear some resemblance to a female body; and it was widely believed by pagans that mandrake roots would influence sexual behavior, and cause conception. As a result, the roots were then greatly valued by pagans (and, in some circles, they still are today)⁸¹. What is going on here among the patriarchs? Rachel and Leah are placing their faith in mandrake roots, and soon Rachel will be stealing her father's favorite idols! There is apparently some serious pagan superstition active in the family v.

88. Conception for Leah and Rachel. (30:17-24)

Leah begins to conceive again and bears two more patriarchs, Issachar and Zebulun, the 9th and 10th, plus a daughter, Dinah. Then Rachel finally conceives,

⁸¹ As recentl as the 17th Century people in Western Europe still embraced this superstition. This makes understandable the famous lines of the cynical English poet John Donne, writing of impossible things: "Go and catch a falling star; Get with child a mandrake root..."

and bears her first child, Joseph, the 11th patriarch. Do you suppose the mandrakes did the trick? Of course not--but Rachel and Leah probably thought they did. Little Dinah will grow up to be a beauty, and the central figure in a great tragedy.

89. Jacob's Strange Business Deal. (30:25-43)

Jacob wants to go back home with his wives and children, but Laban asks him to stay; the chronology is not clear here, but by now Jacob has worked for Laban for about 20 years. Jacob bargains with Laban for his pay, and agrees that his pay will be that all of the less-desirable (the spotted or streaked cattle and goats, plus the brown or black sheep) born among Laban's livestock. By owning the less desirable animals, Jacob will at least be building his own herd and flocks, and Laban agrees. Ah, but Jacob has a sneaky plan: he cuts branches from trees, peels off some of the bark to give the appearance of spots and streaks. These rods he lays in the watering troughs, so the pregnant animals will bear spotted and streaked offspring; and he does this only with the strongest and best of Laban's livestock. Thus the offspring of Laban's best animals will be Jacob's, and those of the weaker ones will be Laban's. In this way, Jacob accumulates large numbers of fine stock and prospers greatly. Again, Jacob is devious, but it seems that he is fulfilling God's promise of prosperity to him, and that God is bringing justice for Laban's trickery in cheating Jacob into working for him (at least) 7 extra years.

NOTE: Here again, as in the case of the mandrakes, we seem to see pagan superstition at work. This passage either reflects a pre-existing superstition, in which God on this occasion chose to act supernaturally, or it is the actual origin, in reality, of the superstitious belief in "marking." In this belief, an unborn child's physical appearance is affected by something the mother sees or hears during gestation. This passage is definitely a mystery, and most Bible commentators (wisely) give it a pass.

90. Time to Return to Canaan. (31:1-21)

Word gets back to Laban that Jacob's livestock are looking great, and that Laban's are looking pretty bad; in short, his sons tell Laban that he is being robbed. Jacob notices that his father-in-law isn't smiling at him anymore, and God tells Jacob that it is time to return to Canaan. Jacob explains it all to Leah and Rachel, revealing the strange plan for getting the best of the livestock. He pleads his own case, telling how Laban has "changed my wages ten times," justifying himself, and says that, through it all, God has protected him⁸². He says that the angel of God

⁸² The matter of Laban's changing Jacob's wages "ten times" is not explained; but it is apparent that Jacob has been keeping track of Laban's dealings with him.

has spoken to him in a dream, saying that He is "the God of Bethel," and telling Jacob that it is time to go home. Leah and Rachel agree.

Fearful that Laban will never allow him to leave, Jacob takes his family and his great possessions and departs secretly for home while Laban is away shearing sheep. Unknown to Jacob, Rachel takes the opportunity to steal some "hearth gods" (small idols) that belong to Laban.

NOTE: there is some serious paganism embraced in this family--first the mandrakes, then "marking" the offspring of the cattle, sheep and goats, and now Laban's little idols. It is not explained.

91. Laban Pursues. (31:22-35)

Laban finds out that they have left, drops what he is doing, pursues Jacob, and catches up with him at Gilead. God (Elohim) has spoken to Laban in a dream, warning him not to speak to Jacob, "either good or bad." The meaning here is obscure, but it probably means "take care that you do not talk in your anger, lose control, and harm Jacob." God is again preserving the messianic line, and Jacob is a key link in the chain.

Jacob, who knows nothing about the idols, denies having stolen them, and for once he is being honest. Laban searches the tents of Jacob, the servants, Leah and Rachel without finding the idols. Rachel has hidden the idols in her camel's saddle and is sitting on them. She asks her father's forgiveness for not getting up to greet him, but tells him that "the custom [period] of women is upon me [and I feel sick]." She knows that he would not search under her; and she gets away with it.

NOTES:

a. In the passage Laban is again referred to as a "Syrian"; this is not a reference to his hereditary status, for he is Abraham's nephew. The term "Syrian" is a reference to the area where he lives.

b. Laban uses "gods" ("elohim") to refer to the idols that Rachel has stolen; with the lower case "g" this is an appropriate and correct use of the word in referring to pagan gods. If this seems wrong, see "Notes on the Names of God" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).

c. Gilead, sometimes called "Mount Gilead," was a hilly, fertile, forested area east of the Jordan River, between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. It was a good place for Jacob to stop, for there was water and abundant pasture there. From balsam trees that once grew there, a healing, aromatic balm ("balm of Gilead") was made and sold. Today those trees are gone; a similar substance is made and sold by monks at Jericho, but it is probably not "the real thing." See in this regard Jeremiah 8:20-22.

92. The Separation Agreement. (31:36-55)

Jacob and Laban argue over children, grandchildren, and the livestock, and reach a standoff. To settle the conflict, they agree to stay away from one another; and, to seal the agreement, they enter into a covenant and build a monument, a “heap” of stones as a boundary and eat a symbolic meal of friendship⁸³. Laban calls the place Mizpah ("watchtower") and speaks the familiar words of what has come to be called "the Mizpah benediction" (verse 49). The next morning Laban kisses his daughters and his grandchildren goodbye, and heads for home.

NOTE: the common understanding of these words today is very positive and nice, but erroneous, for it was not a blessing--it was a warning ("Don't cross this line"). Yet the threatening words of this idol-worshipping pagan have been quoted for centuries by millions of Christians as a godly blessing.

93. Jacob Is Reassured. (32:1-23)

And now Jacob must face Esau, who has sworn to kill him, for the route back home will take Jacob through Edom, Esau's domain. As he continues on his way back to Hebron, Jacob is given a vision of angels, which must have reassured him of God's protection. He names the place Mahanaim (“Double Host”), for he will not have to face Esau alone⁸⁴. Jacob sends messengers in advance to his brother, telling him that he is coming with family and livestock. The messengers return to tell Jacob that his brother is coming to meet him with 400 men. In fear Jacob organizes his family, servants and livestock into two groups so that if Esau destroys one group, maybe the other might escape. Jacob prays, reminding the LORD of his promises about Jacob's future blessings, and sends his people across the Brook Jabbok ahead of him, with gifts of select livestock meant to placate Esau. From the rear, he follows⁸⁵.

94. Jacob's Mysterious Wrestling Match. (32:24-32)

Jacob remains alone to prepare for his confrontation with Esau, and is there confronted by “a man,” who is obviously either an angel or a manifestation of God Himself. Jacob engages in the mysterious wrestling match with “the man,” which lasts for the remainder of the night. Hosea the prophet suggested that Jacob's opponent was God⁸⁶. It is a desperate struggle for Jacob, ending only at sunrise,

⁸³ This covenant will be violated numerous times by the descendants of both Jacob and Laban.

⁸⁴ This place will become an important city, the capitol where Ishbosheth, King Saul's surviving son, will reign briefly after the battle of Gilboa, until he is assassinated (II Samuel 2).

⁸⁵ The Brook Jabbok is a tributary of the River Jordan and an ancient boundary. The mouth, where it empties into the Jordan is about mid-way between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee.

⁸⁶ See in this regard Hosea 12:3-5.

when "the man" touches the inside of Jacob's thigh and it leaves him crippled⁸⁷. The "man" acknowledges Jacob's tenacity, and gives him a new name: Israel.

NOTE: There are various interpretations of this new name, most commonly "God's fighter" or "God's prince."

95. Jacob Confronts Esau. (Chapter 33)

Crossing the Brook Jabbok, Jacob places the maid servants in the lead (the place of greatest danger), then Leah and her children, then Rebekah and her children and, finally, bringing up the rear, Jacob.

Jacob finally has the dreaded meeting with Esau, and in Esau's own territory. Esau brings a small army, and it seems that Jacob is doomed; but instead of falling on Jacob with his sword as he has dreamed of doing for 20 years, Esau falls on his neck with kisses, and the two estranged brothers weep together for love of one another! What has happened here?!? Apparently the Lord has gone before Jacob and performed a miracle in Esau's heart; perhaps the miracle is related to the vision of accompanying angels in 32:1⁸⁸.

Esau tries to decline the gift of livestock, but Jacob insists that he accept it. At any rate, Esau has apparently forgiven Jacob, greets him with love, allows him to pass through his land, and offers to provide an escort of soldiers to protect his caravan. Esau thanks him, but declines the offer. Esau returns to his palace, and Jacob proceeds to Canaan where he buys land and settles at Shechem⁸⁹. There he erects an altar and calls it "El-el-o-he-Israel" (God, the God of Israel).

NOTE: The order in which Jacob's handmaids, wives, and their children go forward to meet Esau is a clear indication of their places in Jacob's heart. Poor Leah has yet another injury to her heart for God to heal.

96. Vengeance Ruins Everything. (Chapter 34)

The affair of Dinah, Jacob's daughter, and Shechem the Prince, is a sordid tragedy. She has grown up to be a beauty, Shechem is smitten with her, and he makes a very bad decision. He defiles her (apparently by force), but wants to do the right thing and marry her. Hamor, Shechem's father, attempts to make peace with Jacob, and seeks a lasting alliance with Jacob's family. Simeon and Levi, angry and deceitful, propose that the alliance be accepted, but on one condition: that Hamor, Shechem and all his men be circumcised. Hamor and Shechem agree, and all their men are circumcised; the matter could have been settled peacefully,

⁸⁷ The "sinew" in verse 32 came to be interpreted as the sciatic nerve. Removing it, with its many branches, was so difficult that many Jewish groups ceased altogether to eat the hindquarters of such animals. Josephus recorded that in his time (1st Century) the custom was still observed (Antiquities 1.20.2); but Jesus and the New Testament writers made no mention of it. Today, this prohibition is observed by some orthodox Jews.

⁸⁸ See in this regard Proverbs 21:1.

⁸⁹ This is the "Sychar" of John 4:5, and the "Sychem" of Acts 7:16.

but for the treachery of Simeon and Levi⁹⁰. They wait until all the men of Hamor are painfully discomfited and unable to fight, put them all to the sword, loot their city and take all their livestock, their women and children. This act of cruel vengeance makes enemies of all the Canaanites around them, but Simeon and Levi are unrepentant.

97. Cleansing the Camp (It's About Time!), and On to Bethel. (35:1-15)

The bloody treachery of Simeon and Levi forces Jacob to move on, and the Lord tells him to go to Bethel and build an altar there. Jacob cleanses the camp of idols (we must wonder why it took him so long), and moves out. Divine, supernatural protection causes the pagan nations to fear to bother the Israelites, and they proceed, unmolested, to Bethel. God appears to Jacob at Bethel, reiterates the name change from Jacob to Israel, repeats the promise made in the same place 21 years before (when Jacob dreamed of the ladder to Heaven), and identifies Himself as "El-shaddai"⁹¹.

NOTE: Jacob's entourage includes the aged Deborah, his mother's nurse, who had accompanied Rebekah when she left Nahor to travel to Isaac as his wife (24:59). She dies at Bethel and the family grieves (verse 8).

98. The Untimely Death of Rachel. (35:16-20)

Rachel bears Benjamin, the 12th patriarch, and dies from complications in childbirth. Before she dies, she calls the baby Benoni ("son of my pain"); but Jacob names him Benjamin ("son of the right hand"). Rachel, Jacob's beloved, is buried near Ephrata (ancient name of Bethlehem); her tomb is between Bethlehem and Jerusalem⁹².

99. Reuben's Great Transgression. (35:22)

After Rachel is buried, Jacob's caravan moves on toward Hebron and pitches its tents beyond Edar. While camped here Reuben commits his great transgression: he has intercourse with Bilhah, his mother's handmaid, his father's concubine, and the mother of two of his brothers, Dan and Naphtali! This outrageously wrong act, apparently a matter of passion brought about by some special set of circumstances, is not explained; and it is dealt with in **only one brief verse**, as if the writer wishes to say as little as possible about it and leave it behind. But Jacob will remember it on his deathbed (49:4); and if it had happened after the giving of

⁹⁰ Levi, this very imperfect man, ancestor of Moses and Aaron, became the father of all the priestly caste (priests and Levites) of Israel. Perhaps there is hope for the rest of us.

⁹¹ El-shaddai means "the Almighty," or "the all-sufficient One" and is more a title than a name. Two verses later in the passage He is clearly identified also as "God (Elohim)."

⁹² Of all the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their wives, Rachel is the only one not buried in the cave of the field of Machpelah at Hebron. The location of her tomb is known today, two miles south of Jerusalem and one mile north of Bethlehem. (Unger, Merrill F., "Unger's Bible Dictionary," page 907)

the Law, Reuben (and possibly Bilhah, depending on her consent) would have been immediately put to death.

100. The Death of Isaac. (35:27-29)

With his family now complete, Jacob returns to his father at Hebron, and his long journey is at an end; Isaac is now 180 years old. With his much-enlarged family finally back together and gathered around him, old Isaac dies, and his burial is presided over by Jacob **and** Esau. The fact that Esau and Isaac jointly bury their father is evidence of the depth of their reconciliation, and is reminiscent of the burial of Abraham by both Isaac and Ishmael.

***NOTE:** The Bible does not tell us when or where Isaac's wife, Rebekah, died--only that she was buried at Hebron, with Abraham and Sarah (49:31).*

101. The Interesting Offspring of Esau. (Chapter 36)

Chapter 36 is a recitation of the offspring of Esau. One of Esau's pagan wives, Bashemath, was Ishmael's daughter (verses 2-3), thus introducing into the Edomite tribe Egyptian genes. A grandson of Esau was Amalek (verse 12); he was the father of the wicked tribe that first resisted Moses in the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 17), and whom God commanded King Saul to "utterly destroy" (I Samuel 15). But the most interesting thing for me about Esau's descendants consists of the clues it gives us concerning the mysteries of Job. This is explained in the **NOTES** below.

NOTES:

a. Some believe that Jobab (verse 33) was the ancestor of Job (of the Book of Job). If true, then Eliphaz, Esau's first-born son (verse 4), would have been the ancestor of one of Job's "comforters," for Eliphaz had a son named Teman (verse 11), who was father of the Temanite tribe; and one of Job's comforters was identified as "Eliphaz the Temanite" (Job 2:11). Places in that time and region were often named for the ruling family; and a grandson of Seir the Horite, who lived in the region of Moab, was named Uz (Job is identified as living in the land of Uz [Job 1:1]). This could be the key to dating the somewhat mysterious Book of Job and, if valid, would date Job at sometime between the time of Joseph and the exodus from Egypt, roughly 1,900-1,500 BC.

b. Strengthening this hypothesis is the fact that "the land of Uz" (Job 1:1) was adjacent to Edom (if not an extension, or a province of Edom). Finis Dake (Dake Annotated Study Bible), ever the literalist and a meticulous Bible detective, places the time of Job between 1843 and 1703 BC. Critical scholars date Job from the time of the Patriarchs, to as recently as 300-400 BC.

102. Joseph's Special Coat and His Trouble-Making Dreams. (37:1-11)

Jacob settles down with his family at Hebron, in his native part of Canaan, and life goes on for about 17 years without significant trouble. When Joseph is 17, Jacob gives him a fine coat "of many colors"; such a coat marks him not only as his father's favorite, but also as first in rank among his siblings. This alone is sufficient to make him even more resented by his older brothers, but Joseph dreams about his future prominence, tells his family of it, and his jealous brothers are greatly offended. To make things still worse, he dreams again, of even greater success and power, and naively tells his family about it; this time even his father is offended. His father, being older and wiser, ponders the meaning of Joseph's dreams; but the boy is in serious trouble with his brothers.

NOTE: The quality of garments was of great significance in the ancient Middle East, denoting both wealth, and rank or social position. The significance of this one was not lost on his brothers.

103. Joseph Is Sold into Slavery. (37:12-36)

Joseph's jealous older brothers are away tending the sheep, and Jacob sends him to check on them; he finds them at Dothan, on the trade route between Syria and Egypt. While he is yet afar off, they recognize him and plot to kill him; and his eldest brother, Reuben, has a secret, counter-plan to save his life. He convinces the others to cast Joseph into a dry well (from which he plans to rescue him later) while they eat. During their meal an Arab ("Ishmaelite") caravan arrives carrying spices and balm from Gilead to Egypt. At Judah's suggestion, and while Reuben is temporarily away (apparently as part of his plan to liberate Joseph), they sell Joseph as a slave to Midianite merchants in a second caravan⁹³. They keep his coat and fake his death by soaking it with goat's blood, breaking their father's heart. In Egypt Joseph is sold to Potiphar, commander of Pharaoh's guard.

NOTES:

a. Reuben, after his extremely irresponsible act with his father's concubine, is, in this episode, the one responsible brother, attempting to nullify the evil plans of his younger brothers.

b. The brothers (except for Reuben) are so heartless that, with Joseph undoubtedly crying to them out of the pit for help, they sit down again and finished their meal. After killing the kid to get its blood, they probably cooked and ate it also. They will have great cause later to repent of their heartless wickedness.

104. The Trials of Tamar. (38:1-24)

⁹³ Joseph is, in many ways, a type of Christ. Here the brothers sell Joseph for 20 pieces of silver at Judah's suggestion. Two thousand years later, Jesus will be sold for 30 pieces of silver by Judas (a form of the name "Judah"), one of his chosen (adopted) Christian brothers.

Judah, apparently young and unwise, violates the will of Abraham, Isaac and (presumably Jacob), and marries a pagan girl from Adullam who quickly bears him 3 sons⁹⁴. The fruit of this ill-advised marriage is decidedly bad. Er, his firstborn, marries an Israelite girl named Tamar; but he is so wicked that "the LORD slew him" in a way that the Bible doesn't bother to explain, disposing of this loser in two brief verses. Tamar, childless, is then given to Er's younger brother, Onan, "to raise up seed" to his dead brother. Onan, in rebellion, practices coitus interruptus to avoid impregnating Tamar, and the LORD slays him also. Judah, perhaps afraid that if she marries his remaining son he will also perish, sends Tamar back to her father, condemned to childless widowhood, with a flimsy excuse that the surviving son is too young to marry.

Judah's wife dies, and his daughter-in-law, a resourceful woman, decides to take care of herself in a man's world. Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute (which conceals her identity), he makes a deal with her for a young goat, and gives her his signet ring, bracelets and staff as collateral⁹⁵. She returns home with the evidence, resumes her role as a widow, and waits until her pregnancy is known. When she is "exposed" as having played the harlot, Judah condemns her to be burned.

105. Tamar's Triumph. (38:25-30)

Dragged in public disgrace before her father-in-law, Tamar produces the evidence that identifies Judah as the father of her babies. He immediately realizes that he has been had, confesses, and declares that, "She hath been more righteous than I..."; chastened, he makes no further claim upon her. She bears twins by Judah, Zerah and Pharez, and becomes a direct ancestor of the Messiah.

NOTE: In Hebrew genealogies, only men were named--never women; yet she has the honor of being one of only 3 women named in the genealogy of Jesus (along with Rahab the harlot, and Ruth) for whom this tradition was broken. A 4th woman (Bathsheba) is honored by appearing in the genealogy, but is not named (Matthew 1:1-5).

106. Cream Rises to the Top: The Saga of Joseph, Potiphar, and Mrs. Potiphar. (Chapter 39)

Joseph arrives in Egypt and is re-sold, this time to Potiphar, Commander of Pharaoh's Guard. Soon realizing that he has bought a winner, Potiphar places Joseph in control of all that he has, and the Lord prospers him because of Joseph. Everything is fine until Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph. Furious because Joseph turns her down and flees, she accuses him of attempted rape. Very

⁹⁴ Adullam was southwest of Jerusalem. Later, David will hide from King Saul there, in a cave nearby.

⁹⁵ This was outrageously excessive collateral to be demanded by a prostitute; Tamar must have been in a very strong bargaining position!

naturally, Potiphar believes his wicked wife and puts Joseph in prison; Joseph has lost it all, because of the woman's wickedness, and his virtue. Yet, even in prison, he quickly rises to a position of authority and power, as the deputy to the commander of the prison. Why? Like before, with Potiphar, the Lord gave him favor and prospered the prison commander for Joseph's sake. Once more, cream has risen to the top.

NOTE: In verses 2 and 3 we see that in Potiphar's reasoning about Joseph he realized "the LORD" (all capitals) was with him and prospered him (and thus prospered Potiphar). And in verses 14 and 17, when Potiphar's wife is lying about Joseph, she twice speaks of him as a "Hebrew." How did Potiphar know of the LORD (YHWH)? And how did Potiphar and his wife know what a Hebrew was? Perhaps Joseph had told those around him that he was a Hebrew. Had he witnessed to Potiphar about YHWH, the Hebrew GOD? Perhaps. We can only wonder, and marvel at the mind and oversight of GOD.

107. Joseph Interprets Dreams in Prison. (Chapter 40)

Pharaoh's cup-bearer ("butler"), and his royal baker, are put into prison under Joseph's authority; it seems to be a special part of the prison for high-ranking offenders⁹⁶. Each of them dreams a prophetic dream, which Joseph interprets; Joseph's interpretation is good news for the cup-bearer, but extremely bad news for the baker. The meaning is that in three days the cup-bearer will be restored to his former position, but the chief baker will be hanged and his flesh eaten by birds. Joseph asks the cup-bearer to intercede for him with Pharaoh when he is restored to his position; but the cup-bearer's gratitude is short-lived and he forgets Joseph.

108. Pharaoh's Dreams and the Cup-Bearer Finally Remembers. (41:1-24)

Two years after the cup-bearer is restored, Pharaoh has two troubling dreams in one night. None of his magicians or wise men can interpret the dreams, and the cup-bearer **finally** remembers Joseph; he tells Pharaoh of his experience with Joseph and his interpretations of dreams. Pharaoh sends for Joseph, and wants him immediately; Joseph quickly washes, shaves, puts on his "Sunday best," and appears before Pharaoh. Before Pharaoh, Joseph quickly makes it clear that it is God who gives interpretations of dreams, not he, and Pharaoh tells him of his troubling dreams.

109. Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams, and Has a Plan. (41:25-36)

Having first given the glory to God, and rejecting any for himself, and then listening to Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph tells him that the two dreams are one

⁹⁶ In the ancient Orient, the cup-bearer was the highest ranking among a king's servants. He was the closest to the king, constantly at his side to serve him personally, and often had considerable influence over the king's decisions.

message from God, in order to warn him of a future crisis⁹⁷. The meaning of the dreams is that there will be seven years of great plenty, followed by seven years of terrible drought and famine. Joseph suggests a plan to Pharaoh for storing the excess grain during the years of plenty, so as to have enough for the years of dearth.

110. Joseph Is Promoted. (41:37-45)

Pharaoh likes the plan so much that he decrees it on the spot, puts Joseph in charge of it, and makes Joseph the de-facto ruler of Egypt, with authority over everyone except Pharaoh and his family. He also gives Joseph a high-ranking Egyptian woman for his wife.

NOTE: At this point, I wonder what Potiphar's wicked, lying wife is thinking about Joseph and what she had done to him; I would imagine that she is having some sleepless nights, for "the wicked flee when no man pursueth" (Proverbs 28:1).0

111. Joseph Saves Egypt and Has Two Sons. (41:46-57)

Joseph builds storage buildings throughout Egypt and fills them with grain during the seven years of plenty. During this time of plenty, he also has two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim. When the seven years of dearth come, he is well prepared; he has more than enough, not only for the people of Egypt, but a surplus to sell to other nations, for the famine is over that entire part of the World, not just in Egypt.

112. Jacob Sends His Sons "Down to Egypt." (42:1-14)

As drought and famine afflict Canaan, Jacob sends 10 of his sons in a caravan to Egypt to buy grain. He keeps Benjamin (his youngest, and Rachel's other son) with him for fear of losing him as he had lost Joseph. The brothers prostrate themselves before Joseph, with their faces on the ground. Pretending not to know them, he remembers his dream, that his elders would serve him and do obeisance (bow before him). Speaking in the Egyptian language, through an interpreter, he accuses them of being spies, which they deny. The brothers tell him that there had been 12 sons, but one is no longer with them (he must be thinking, "Yeah, tell me about it!"), and that there is a younger son who stayed behind with their aged father. In this way Joseph learns that his father is still alive.

NOTE: In the Authorized Version (KJV) when the word "corn" is used it means "grain" (wheat or Rye), not the corn that we know. Our corn is a New World

⁹⁷ Throughout the Old Testament period, God never hesitated to speak to pagan rulers, usually in dreams, in order to bring about the outworking of His will. Here God, in doing so, accomplishes (at least) two things at once: heading off a famine in Egypt so Jacob and his family will not starve, and giving Joseph a huge promotion, making possible the preservation of the messianic line.

plant, originating in nature, domesticated and improved over many centuries, creating the vast fields of corn grown today to feed man and his livestock.

113. Joseph Demands to See Benjamin. (42:15-28)

Still speaking to his brothers in the Egyptian language, Joseph deals roughly with them, and demands to see Benjamin. When he can no longer control his emotions, he leaves the room, weeps, and then regains control. He returns, but his brothers still do not recognize him. Keeping Simeon as collateral, and sends the rest back home, laden with food, and they promise to return with Benjamin. He also has the money that they had paid for the food restored to them, hidden in the sacks of food. They are now in fear, thinking that Pharaoh's ruler (Joseph) will think that they have stolen it. But they press onward toward home with the food and the money.

114. Back Home with Food and Money. (42:29-38)

The nine brothers return to Jacob and tell him of their experience in Egypt. When they tell Jacob that they must return to Egypt and take young Benjamin, Jacob refuses. To him, it seems that he has lost Joseph, and now Simeon, and he will not risk losing Benjamin also. Reuben, once again exercising responsibility as the eldest (and appearing to have heard from God), tells his father that if he takes Benjamin to Egypt, and fails to bring him back, Jacob may kill both of Reuben's sons. This is a serious guarantee but Jacob still refuses.

115. The Brothers Return with Benjamin. (43:1-14)

When the food from Egypt is exhausted, although Jacob is extremely reluctant, the nine brothers return to Egypt for more food and take Benjamin with them. They take the money remaining from the first trip, plus the same amount ("double money"), and a gift of small amounts of spices, balm, honey and nuts, and depart for Egypt.

116. Joseph Is Again Overcome. (43:15-34)

The brothers arrive in Egypt with Benjamin, still worried about having found their money restored to them in the first visit, but Joseph reassures them and brings Simeon out to them unharmed. Invited to dine in Joseph's home, they again prostrate themselves before him in fulfillment of his dreams. At the meal, Joseph is again overcome by his emotions and flees to a private room to weep⁹⁸.

117. Joseph Sets Them Up Again. (44:1-15)

When it is time for the brothers to return to Canaan with their grain, Joseph again secretly has their money restored to their baggage, and goes one step farther: he has his personal silver cup concealed in Benjamin's sack, as if he had stolen it. Joseph sends his steward out to "discover" the silver cup, and bring them back.

⁹⁸ Although the meal is celebratory, note the segregation at the meal, according to rank and nationality.

When, to their horror, the silver cup is found in Benjamin's sack, it appears that things can't get any worse.

NOTE: At a glance, verses 5 and 15 present a problem; for Joseph to use divination to discover the unknown seems to be a contradiction of everything else that we know about Joseph, the purity of his character, and his relationship with God. And, what the record does reveal is a man without guile or ambition who, from childhood, has been visited by God with revelations in the form of dreams. Also, like Daniel, a man of similar purity of character, God gave Joseph, when needed, the supernatural ability to interpret dreams of others.

There is no record of Joseph's ever using occult divination to discover the hidden things of God--and why should he?. This would seem to be a piece of the Joseph puzzle that glaringly does not fit. Although divination will not be officially proscribed until late in the life of Moses, it is an abomination to God⁹⁹. And remember, Joseph never said that he used the cup for divination; he only instructed his steward to imply that he did.

Then what do we make of verses 5 and 15? Although very rich and powerful Egyptians (and others) used such cups for divination, there is no indication that Joseph ever did. It seems clear to me that he instructed his steward to say this in order to put fear into his brothers, soon after their departure, to guarantee their quick return (see verses 3 and 4). Although the great commentator Matthew Henry (1662-1714) hurries past it without comment, respected contemporary commentators such as Dr. David Guzik and Dr. Henry Morris agree with my position, citing (1) Joseph's flawless character and (2) the lack of any evidence that he ever resorted to occult divination.

118. Joseph Reveals Himself. (44:16-45:4)

Faced with the certain loss of Benjamin, a thing too horrible to contemplate, Judah pleads with Joseph, recounting the entire situation, and offering himself as a slave in place of Benjamin. Finally, Joseph cannot contain his emotions any longer, and he reveals his identity to his amazed and terrified brothers.

119. Joseph Forgives and Pharaoh Is Pleased. (45:5-24)

Joseph forgives his brothers, and assures them that their wrongdoing toward him was in the plan of God to preserve the family. Pharaoh hears of it, and likes what he hears; he personally invites Jacob and all his family to come live in Egypt, and as his royal guests¹⁰⁰. Not only that, but he promises them the best of everything,

⁹⁹ See in this regard Deuteronomy 18:9-14 and Isaiah 47:7-15.

¹⁰⁰ This is supernatural, for Egyptians considered Hebrews (and perhaps all residents of Canaan) inferior, and it was an abomination even to eat with them (43:32); to make things worse. Egyptians hated sheep herders (46:34). Yet Pharaoh readily rolled out the red carpet for them.

"the fat of the land"¹⁰¹. Joseph sends his brothers back to Jacob, loaded down with good things, and with larger portions for Benjamin, his only full brother¹⁰². And they return with Egyptian wagons, pulled by horses or mules, a luxury unknown in Canaan (and, perhaps, a technology as yet unknown there).

120. Old Jacob Sees the Wagons. (45:25-28)

Loaded down with food and gifts, the brothers return to Jacob with the good news that Joseph is alive and in power over all of Egypt. The news is too much for the old man to take in; he simply can't believe it. After all, he has believed for all those years that Joseph is dead, and has adjusted to the idea that he would never see him again. But the sight of those Egyptian wagons, loaded with good things, is something he can't deny; he believes that Joseph is alive, and agrees to go with them to Egypt, to see Joseph "before I die."

121. Moving the Family to Egypt. (46:1-7)

Jacob and his family, with all their livestock, move to Egypt in wagons and draft animals provided by Pharaoh (this is mind-boggling VIP treatment by Pharaoh!). Jacob makes a stop at Beersheba to worship before crossing the border and leaving Canaan, and God speaks to him there. At Beersheba God reassures Jacob that he is doing the right thing, and graciously promises to go with him to Egypt. He even promises that Joseph will be with Jacob when he dies, to close his eyes ("...shall put his hand upon thine eyes."). Then Jacob travels on to the Land of Goshen, taking his entire family with him, and all of his possessions.

NOTES:

a. Verses 8 through 27 of Chapter 46 present a detailed listing of the members of Jacob's family who made the trip into Egypt, a total of 66 souls. When we add Joseph, his 2 children, and Jacob himself, the total number of Israelites entering Egypt at the beginning was 70¹⁰³. When they leave Egypt in the Exodus 215 years later, their numbers will have grown to about 2,000,000.

b. The exact number is known but to God. The text states that there were "600,000 on foot that were men, besides children...and a mixed multitude." The 600,000 men were probably warriors, for there are references in the text to their being organized into "armies." Add to the 600,000 men those of the tribe of Levi,

¹⁰¹ This rendering by the King James translators of Pharaoh's metaphor for the best that he had, "the fat of the land," appears to be the origin of the expression in modern English.

¹⁰² All 12 brothers had the same father, but there were four mothers involved. Benjamin was Joseph's only full brother, Rachel's other son.

¹⁰³ This figure is a matter of some dispute. Stephen, in his great speech before being martyred (Acts 7:14), gives the total as 75, and the Septuagint also says 75. Since in none of these cases are the parameters for counting explained, the differences are almost certainly the result of different standards for inclusion--i.e. whom should be counted. Following the Hebrew tradition, it seems that females were not included.

and others, unfit to fight, plus all the women and children, plus the "mixed multitude" of non-Hebrews (slaves, servants, workers, etc.) who went with them, and the total is estimated to have been as many as 6,000,000. To estimate a total of 2,000,000 Hebrews in the Exodus is reasonable, if not decidedly conservative.

122. Jacob Finally Sees Joseph. (46:28-34)

When Jacob and his caravan arrive in Goshen, they are met by Joseph in his royal chariot. Jacob and his long-lost son embrace and weep together for a long time ("a good while"). Jacob is so happy that he says he will be satisfied to die right there, having finally been reunited with Joseph. With some advice from Joseph about what to say and what not say, Jacob and his family are ready to be presented to Pharaoh.

123. Prospering in Egypt. (47:1-12)

First five of Joseph's brothers are presented to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh authorizes Joseph to appoint them to positions of authority over the royal herds. Then Jacob is presented to Pharaoh, who enquires of Jacob's age (130), and officially gives him Goshen, the very best of the land, to live in¹⁰⁴. Jacob blesses Pharaoh (twice) and Pharaoh accepts the blessings, even though Jacob is inferior in position and power. Joseph's family settles in, and prospers, in Goshen.

***NOTE:** The next portion of the narrative is the story of momentous events in Egypt that change the very social and political structure of the nation; and this is done with no explanation or continuity with what goes before it. It appears that, as the human author of Genesis (very likely Moses) compiled the earlier records, what follows was the next noteworthy sequence of events. They were certainly noteworthy, but without any bridge from what had gone on before.*

124. Joseph saves Egypt from Famine and Financial Collapse. (47:13-26)

Widespread famine and financial collapse strike Egypt, and the people are suffering; their survival seems to be threatened. They have no food, the value of their money is failing, and they are facing death. They come to Joseph, ask him to rescue them, and he wisely devises a system of centralized control over the people, land and crops, to allow for their survival. The government will own all of the land, and will provide them with food for the first year so that they can survive. Then Joseph builds cities throughout the land for the people to live in, assigns land to each family, and provides seed to sow. In return, the people give to Pharaoh 1/5th of the crops each year. The changes have been hugely significant, and apparently permanent, but Joseph has once again saved the day, and nothing more is said about it. Verse 26 tells us that Joseph established this law, which continued

¹⁰⁴ "The land of Goshen" was in northeastern Egypt, in the valley of the Nile; it was extremely fertile land for pasture and for growing grain (and it still is).

to be the law "unto this day"(the time of the writing of Genesis).

124. Jacob Prepares for His Death. (47:27-31)

After living happily in Egypt with his reunited family for 17 years, Jacob sickens and he knows that he has reached the end of his life. He makes Joseph promise to bury him back in Canaan with his ancestors and Leah, in the cave of Machpelah, at Hebron. Joseph makes the promise, and old Jacob is ready to die peacefully¹⁰⁵.

125. Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons. (Chapter 48)

Knowing (being told) that his father's death is near, Joseph brings his 2 sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to Jacob's bed to be blessed. Old Jacob, now blind, gathers his strength and sits up on the side of his bed. He blesses Joseph and then draws the children to him, kisses them, and places his hands on their heads. Joseph sees that Jacob's right hand is on the head of Ephraim, instead of Manasseh the firstborn, and thinks it is a mistake. He tries to rearrange his father's hands, but Jacob has done it deliberately, prophesying that Manasseh will be great, but Ephraim will be greater. As was the case with Joseph's prophetic dream about becoming superior to his elders (37:5-11), so God has again selected the younger brother to become greater than the elder.

NOTE: 48:12 gives us a beautiful glimpse into the humanity of those in this scene. Old people, especially those who are sick, can be frightening to small children. Here we see the 2 little boys, brought to the deathbed of their blind, 147-year-old grandfather, one whom they have not known growing up, hiding for security between their father's knees. It is a perfect reminder of my own small children many years ago, when being coerced to accept the kisses of aged, unfamiliar ancestors. Shamelessly, I bribed them with candy to accept the kisses of their great-grandmother and great, great aunts, to please the elderly ones, and avoid an emotional scene. I would probably do it again.

126. Jacob Prophecies Over His Sons and Dies. (Chapter 49)

Jacob gathers his sons to his bedside and prophesies over each one. In the prophecies he notes the sin of Reuben with Bilhah, and the cruelty of Simeon and Levi at Shechem. Particularly significant is the prophecy concerning Judah, which speaks of the kingship which shall descend from him (beginning with David), and the Messiah who will not be born for nearly 2,000 years (verse 10--one of the classic prophecies of the Messiah Jesus)). With the prophecies completed, and his burial with his ancestors assured, Jacob peacefully yields up his spirit and dies.

¹⁰⁵ Notice that when exacting Joseph's promise, Jacob makes him place his hand under the thigh; this is the same thing Abraham did when making his servant promise not to bring back a Canaanite girl to be Isaac's wife. See 24:2 and the explanatory note.

127. Jacob's Burial. (50:1-14)

At Joseph's command, Jacob is embalmed. After a period of mourning, his body is taken back to Hebron by Joseph and all his family, except for the small children. They are accompanied by a huge escort of Egyptian noblemen, with chariots and cavalry. Jacob is buried in the tomb of Abraham and Isaac at Hebron; and Joseph, his family and the Egyptian escort, return to Egypt.

128. The Death of Joseph. (50:15-26)

After returning to Egypt Joseph's brothers, still afflicted with guilt, fear that Joseph will now take revenge upon them for selling him into slavery. They lie to Joseph, saying that Jacob, before he died, had asked that Joseph not punish them. They need not have lied, for what they said made Joseph weep to think that they still feared him. In his final pronouncement on the subject, Joseph summarizes it in a statement often quoted today, reminding them that what they had intended for evil, God had meant for good (verse 20). Joseph lives out his life happily in Egypt, long enough to know and enjoy his great-grandchildren. Knowing that his end is near, like his father before him, Joseph makes his sons promise to take his body back to Canaan, and he dies peacefully at age 110. He is embalmed and buried (temporarily) in Egypt.

129. One Final Thought.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714), the great man of God and Bible commentator, made this interesting observation on the ending of the Book of Genesis: *Thus the book of Genesis, which began with the origin of light and life, ends with nothing but death and darkness; so sad a change has sin made.*