

Genesis

A Suggested Outline of Genesis

- I. History of Humanity in General (1–11)
 - A. Creation of the heavens and earth (1–2)
 - B. Adam and his family (3–5)
 - The Fall of man (3).
 - C. Noah and his family (6–11)
 - The Flood (6–10).
 - The Babel rebellion (11).
- II. History of Israel in Particular (12–50)
 - A. Abraham—The father who gave his son (12:1–25:18)
 - B. Isaac—The son who took a bride (25:19–26:35)
 - C. Jacob—The flesh vs. the Spirit (27:1–36:43)
 - D. Joseph—The providence of God (37:1–50:26)

Introductory Notes to Genesis

I. Name

“Genesis” is from a Greek word meaning “beginning” or “generation.” The word “genesis” is translated “generation” in Matt. 1:1. Genesis is the book of generations, or beginnings. There are ten generations noted in the book: the heavens and earth (2:4); Adam (5:1); Noah (6:9); Shem (11:10); Terah (11:27); Ishmael (25:12); Isaac (25:19); Esau (36:1); and Jacob (37:2). As the seed-plot for the entire Bible, Genesis records for us the momentous beginning of the universe, human history, civilization, sin, salvation, sacrifice, marriage, and the family.

II. Author

It is generally agreed that Moses is the author of the first five books of the Bible, called “the Pentateuch” (from the Gk., *penta*, “five” and *teuchos*, “the case books were kept in”). Of course, Moses was not alive when the events in Genesis occurred, but the Spirit directed him in his writing (2 Peter 1:20–21). Christ believed that Moses wrote the books assigned to him (see John 5:45–47), and that is good enough authority for us.

III. Purpose

As you read Genesis, you cannot help but note that the first eleven chapters are general and without extensive detail; while the rest of the book, starting with chapter 12, gives the lives of four men in great detail: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. As you will note in our suggested outline of Genesis, the first section (1–11) deals with humankind in general and explains the origin of man and

sin, while the last section (12–50) deals with Israel in particular. This suggests that the purpose of the book is to explain the beginnings of man and his sin and Israel and God's plan of salvation. In fact, one of the key themes in Genesis is divine election.

We begin with “the heavens and the earth,” but then God chooses to deal with the earth, not the heavens; the theme from then on is God's program on earth. Having chosen the earth, God now bypasses the angels (fallen angels included) and elects to deal with man. From Adam's many sons, God chooses Seth (4:25). Of Seth's many descendants (Gen. 5), God chooses Noah (6:8), and from Noah's family, He chooses Shem (11:10), Terah (11:27), and finally Abraham (12:1). Abraham has many children, but Isaac is the chosen seed (21:12). Isaac has two sons, Jacob and Esau, and God chooses Jacob to be the recipient of His blessing.

All of this reveals God's gracious divine election. Not one of those people chosen deserved the honor; as is true for all believers, their election resulted fully from God's grace. Along with the electing grace of God, Genesis illustrates the wonderful power and providence of God. Men would disobey and doubt Him, yet He would rule and overrule to accomplish His purposes. Had His program failed in Genesis, there could have been no Messiah born in Bethlehem centuries later.

IV. Genesis and Revelation

The beginnings recorded in Genesis have their fulfillment in Revelation. God created the heaven and the earth (Gen. 1:1) and will one day create a new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1). Satan first attacked man (Gen. 3) yet will be defeated in his last attack (Rev. 20:7–10). God made darkness and light (Gen. 1:5), but one day there will no longer be night (Rev. 21:23; 22:5). There will be no more sea (Gen. 1:10; Rev. 21:1), and the curse will be lifted from creation (Gen. 3:14–17; Rev. 22:3). God drove man out of the garden (Gen. 3:24), but God's people will be welcomed into the heavenly paradise (Rev. 22:1ff), and the tree of life will be restored to man (Rev. 22:14). Babylon will be destroyed (Gen. 10:8–10; Rev. 17–19) and the promised judgment of Satan fulfilled (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 20:10).

V. Christ in Genesis

According to Luke 24:27, 44–45 Christ is found in “all the Scriptures.” Following are but a few of the references to Christ in Genesis.

1. The creative Word—Gen. 1:3; John 1:1–5; 2 Cor. 4:3–7
2. The Last Adam—Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15:45
3. The Seed of the woman—Gen. 3:15; Gal. 3:19; 4:4
4. Abel—Gen. 4; Heb. 11:4; 12:24
5. Noah and the flood—Gen. 6–10; 1 Peter 3:18–22
6. Melchizedek—Gen. 14; Heb. 7–10
7. Isaac, the child of promise—Gen. 17; Gal. 4:21–31 (Isaac pictures Christ in his miraculous birth, his willingness to die, his “resurrection” [Heb. 11:19], and his taking of a bride. Of course, Jesus actually died and arose from the dead. In Isaac, these events were only symbolic.)

8. The Lamb—Gen. 22:7–8; John 1:29
9. Jacob's ladder—Gen. 28:12ff; John 1:51
10. Joseph—Gen. 37–50 (Rejected by His brothers; beloved of the Father; made to suffer unjustly; exalted to reign. Joseph's brothers did not recognize him the first time they saw him, but they did recognize him the second time. So with Israel is their recognition of their Messiah.)

Genesis 1

We will confine ourselves to some major truths found in this important passage.

I. The Creator

No scientist or historian can improve upon, "In the beginning God ..." This simple statement refutes the atheist, who says there is no God; the agnostic, who claims we cannot know God; the polytheist who worships many gods; the pantheist, who says that "all nature is God"; the materialist, who claims that matter is eternal and not created; and the fatalist, who teaches that there is no divine plan behind creation and history. God's personality is seen in this chapter, for He speaks, sees, names, and blesses. The scientist may claim that matter just "came into being," that life "happened," and that all complex forms of life "gradually evolved" from lower forms, but he cannot prove his claim. That there are changes within species (such as the development of the horse or the house cat) we admit, but that there are changes from one kind of creature into another, we will not accept. Why did God create the universe? Certainly not to add anything to Himself, since He needs nothing. Actually, creation limits God, since the Eternal must now confine Himself to work in time and human history. The Word makes it clear that Christ is the Author, Sustainer, and Goal of creation (Col. 1:15–17; Rev. 4:11). Christ, the Living Word, reveals God in the written Word and in the book of nature (John 1:1–5; also see Ps. 19).

What does creation reveal about God? Creation reveals: (1) His wisdom and power (Job 28:23–27; Prov. 3:19); (2) His glory (Ps. 19:1); (3) His power and Godhead (Rom. 1:18–21); (4) His love for insignificant man (Ps. 8:3–9); (5) His providential care (Isa. 40:12ff). Our Lord, when on earth, saw the gracious hand of the Father even in the flowers and fowl (Matt. 6:25ff).

The Hebrew name for God in Gen. 1 is *Elohim*—the name of God that links Him with creation. The basic root of the name is *El* which means "mighty, strong, prominent." In 2:4 we have "LORD God" which is *Jehovah Elohim*. *Jehovah* is the covenant name of God and links Him to His people. This is the name He gave when He spoke to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14–15, nkjv). It means that He is the self-existing, unchanging God.

II. The Creation

The existence of the angels and the fall of Satan antedated the Creation, for the angels ("sons of God") sang at Creation (Job 38:7). Lucifer was the highest of God's created beings in this original Creation (see Ezek. 28:11–19) and wanted to take the place of God (Isa. 14:12–17). We find Satan already on the scene in Gen. 3, so that his fall must have taken place earlier.

The earth was formless, so on the first three days, God formed what He wanted. The earth was empty, so God filled up what He had formed. He made the expanse of the heavens ("firmament") and filled it with stars and planets. He made the land and filled it with plants and animals. He made the seas and filled them with fish and water mammals. God brought light into being before He

placed the lights into the heavens. Note the principle of separation illustrated in Creation; for God divided light from darkness and seas from land (see 2 Cor. 6:14–18). Note too that each living thing was to reproduce “after its kind”; there is no suggestion here of gradual evolution. We may breed different kinds of cattle, but we cannot breed a cow into a reindeer!

Man is the crown of Creation. There is a “divine conference” among the members of the Godhead before man is created, something not seen at any other step of the Creation. Some of the angels had already rebelled against God, and He certainly knew what man would do. Yet, in His love and grace, He molded the first man “in His image,” referring to man’s personality—mind, will, emotions, freedom—rather than his physical appearance. (See Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10.) Man was given the place of dominion over the earth, the highest position in Creation. This explains the attack of Satan; for Satan (Lucifer) had once held this position and had wanted an even higher one! If Lucifer could not have the place of God in the universe, then he would try to take the place of God in human’s lives. And he succeeded! Man lost his dominion through sin (Ps. 8 and Heb. 2:5–18), but this dominion has been regained for us by Christ, the Last Adam (see Rom. 5). When on earth, Jesus proved that He had dominion over the fish (Luke 5; Matt. 17:24ff), the fowl (Matt. 26:74–75), and the beasts (Matt. 21:1–7).

Man’s diet was originally vegetarian, but this was changed in Gen. 9:3–4. The Jews were given dietary restrictions (Lev. 11), but there are no such restrictions today (Mark 7:17–23; Acts 10:9–16; 1 Tim. 4:1–5).

III. The New Creation

Second Corinthians 4:3–6 and 5:17 make it clear that, in Christ, God has a new creation. Paul uses imagery from the Genesis creation account to illustrate this new creation. Man was created perfect but was ruined through sin. He is born a sinner, “without form and void”; his life is purposeless and empty and dark.

The Holy Spirit begins His work of conviction “moving” in men’s hearts (Gen. 1:2). Indeed, salvation always begins with the Lord (Jonah 2:9); it is of His grace that any sinner is ever saved. The Spirit uses the Word to bring light (Ps. 119:130), for there can be no salvation apart from the Word of God (John 5:24). And Heb. 4:12 says that the Word has the power to “divide,” calling to mind God’s earlier dividing of light and darkness, waters and land.

Like the created beings in Genesis, believers have the responsibility of being fruitful and multiplying “after their kind.” In a parallel to Adam’s position of dominion, the believer is part of royalty under God’s rule and can “reign in life” through Christ (Rom. 5:17ff).

Just as Adam was the head of the old creation, so Christ is the Head of the new creation; He is the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45–49). The OT is the “book of the generations of Adam” (Gen. 5:1), and it ends speaking of a curse (Mal. 4:6). The NT is the “book of the generation of Jesus Christ” (Matt. 1:1), and it ends with “no more curse” (Rev. 22:3).

Genesis 2

I. The First Sabbath (2:1–3)

The word “Sabbath” simply means “to cease.” God did not “rest” because He was weary, since God does not become weary (Ps. 121:4). Rather, He ceased from His creative works; the task was now finished. He had blessed the creatures (1:22) and man (1:28). Now He blessed the Sabbath by setting it apart as a special day. There is no commandment here for people to observe the Sabbath. In fact, since Adam was created on the sixth day, the Sabbath Day was actually the first day for him.

The Sabbath does not appear again in the OT until Ex. 20:8–11, where God gave the Sabbath to Israel as His special covenant sign (Ex. 31:12–17). There is no evidence in Scripture that God ever told the Gentiles to observe the Sabbath; in fact, Ps. 147:19–20 makes it clear that the OT Mosaic Law was given only to Israel. One reason why Israel went into captivity was that the people profaned the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15–22). While on earth, Christ observed the Sabbath since He lived under the dispensation of law. Of course, He did not follow the man-made rules of the Pharisees (Mark 2:23–28).

In the early years of the church, Christians did meet on the Sabbath in the synagogues, until Jewish believers were persecuted and driven out. However, the first day of the week (Sunday, the Lord's Day) was their special day for fellowship and worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1–3; Rev. 1:10). The first day commemorates Christ's resurrection (Matt. 28:1; John 20:1), the completion of His work in bringing about the new creation. See 2 Cor. 5:17. These two special days—the Sabbath and the Lord's Day—commemorate different things and must not be confused. The Sabbath Day relates to the old creation and was given expressly to Israel. The Lord's Day relates to the new creation and belongs especially to the church. The Sabbath speaks of law as six days of labor which are followed by rest, but the Lord's Day speaks of grace, for we begin the week with rest that is followed by works.

Hebrews 4 indicates that the OT Sabbath is a type of the future kingdom of rest, as well as the spiritual rest we have through faith in Christ. Colossians 2:13–17 makes it clear that the Sabbath belongs to the “shadows” of law and not the full light of grace. If people want to worship on the Sabbath, they certainly may, but they must not judge or condemn believers who do not join them (Col. 2:16–17). Galatians 4:9–11 indicates that the legalistic keeping of Sabbaths is a return to bondage. Romans 14:4–13 suggests that Sabbath-keeping can be the mark of an immature Christian who has a weak conscience. Certainly various groups of professing Christians may worship on Saturday if they prefer, but they must not condemn those who give special emphasis to worship on Sunday, resurrection day.

II. The First Garden (2:4–14)

Bible history can be summarized with four gardens: (1) Eden, where sin entered; (2) Gethsemane, where Christ yielded to death; (3) Calvary, where He died and was buried (see John 19:41–42); and (4) the heavenly “paradise garden” (Rev. 21:1ff). Moses describes the first home God gave to the first couple. Further details given here are not included in the creation account of chap. 1; these are complementary, not contradictory. Verse 5 indicates that God needed man to help till the ground. Man was “formed” as the potter forms the clay (same word in Jer. 18:1ff). Man was responsible to dress the garden (tend it) and keep it (guard it, suggesting the presence of an enemy). God gave Adam and Eve all they needed for life and happiness, all that was good and pleasant, and He allowed them to enjoy it in abundance.

The two trees are important. The text in 3:22 suggests that the tree of life sustained life for humankind (see also Rev. 22:2). Had Adam eaten of the tree of life after he sinned, he could not have died, and then death would not have passed upon all men (Rom. 5:12ff) and Christ could not have died to redeem men. The tree of knowledge symbolized the authority of God; to eat of that tree meant to disobey God and incur the penalty of death. We do not know what these trees were, yet it is certain that Adam and Eve understood their importance.

III. The First Law (2:15–17)

Adam was a perfect creature, one having never sinned, but he had the ability to sin. God made Adam a king with dominion (1:26ff). But a ruler can only rule others if he can rule himself, so it was necessary for Adam to be tempted. God has always wanted His creatures to love and obey Him of their own free will and not out of compulsion or because of reward.

This test was perfectly fair and just. Adam and Eve enjoyed liberty and abundant provision in the Garden and did not need the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

IV. The First Marriage (2:18–25)

Everything in Creation was “very good” (1:31) except the loneliness of Adam. “It is not good for man to be alone” points to the basis for marriage: (1) to provide companionship; (2) to carry on the race; (3) to help one another and bring out the best. The word “helpmeet” (v. 18) refers to helper: one that meets his needs. This companion was not found anywhere in animal creation, thus showing the great gulf that is fixed between brute creatures and human beings made in the image of God. God made the first woman out of the flesh and bone of the first man, and He “closed up the flesh in its place” (v. 21, nkjv). The verb “made” in v. 22 is actually the word “built,” as one would build a temple. The fact that Eve was made from Adam shows the unity of the human race and the dignity of woman. It has been remarked that Eve was made, not from the man’s feet to be trampled by him, or from his head to rule over him, but from his side, to be near his heart and loved by him.

Adam had named all the animals that God had brought him (v. 19), thus showing that the first man had intelligence, language, and speech. Now he names his bride “woman” (in the Heb. *ishshah* which is related to *ish* meaning “man”). Thus, in name and nature, man and woman belong to each other. How wonderful it would be if every wedding were performed by God. Then every home would be a paradise on earth.

Of course, this event is a beautiful picture of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:21–33). Christ, the Last Adam, gave birth to the church as He slept in death on the cross and men opened His side (John 19:31–37). He partook of our human nature that we might be partakers of His divine nature. Eve was the object of Adam’s love and concern, just as the church receives Christ’s love and his ministry. Genesis 2:11–15 points out that Adam willingly ate of the forbidden fruit and was not deceived as was Eve. He was willing to become a sinner that he might stay with his bride! So Christ was willing to be made sin for us that we might be with Him forever. What love and grace! Note too that Eve was formed before sin came on the scene, just as we have been chosen in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4).

If we look closely, we can see three pictures of the church in these verses, just as the church is pictured in Ephesians. Eve was the bride (Eph. 5:21–33); she was also part of Adam’s body (Gen. 2:23; Eph. 5:29–30); and she was made or “built,” which suggests the church as a temple of God (Eph. 2:19–22).

Genesis 3

I. Temptation (3:1–6)

A. The tempter.

God is not the author of sin, nor does He tempt people to sin; this is the work of the devil (James 1:13). We have already seen that Satan fell into sin prior to the work of Gen. 1:3ff. He was a beautiful angel originally, rejoicing at God’s Creation (Job 38:4–7), but he sinned and was judged by God (Isa. 14:12–17; Ezek. 28:11–19). Note that Satan came to Eve in the guise of a serpent, for he is a masquerader and appears to people in his true character. In Gen. 3, Satan is the serpent who deceives (2 Cor. 11:3); in Gen. 4, he is the liar that murders (John 8:44). We must take care to avoid his deceptive ways.

B. The target.

Satan aimed at Eve's mind (2 Cor. 11:1–3; 1 Tim. 2:9–15) and succeeded in deceiving her. Man's mind is a part of his being created in God's image (Col. 3:9–10), so Satan attacks God when he attacks the human mind. Satan uses lies. He is a liar himself and the father of lies (John 8:44).

C. The tactic.

As long as the mind holds to God's truth, Satan cannot win; but once the mind doubts God's Word, there is room for the devil's lies to move in. Satan questioned God's Word (v. 1), denied God's Word (v. 4), and then substituted his own lies (v. 5). Note that Satan seeks to undermine our faith in the goodness of God—he suggested to Eve that God was “holding out on them” by keeping them from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When we question God's goodness and doubt His love, we are playing right into the hands of Satan. Satan made the temptation sound wonderful by making an offer: “You will be like God!” Satan himself had wanted to be “like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14), and centuries later he offered Christ “all the kingdoms of the world” if He would worship him (Matt. 4:8).

D. The tragedy.

Eve should not have “given place to the devil” (Eph. 4:27); she should have held to God's Word and resisted him. We wonder where Adam was during this conversation. At any rate, Eve took away from God's Word by omitting “freely” (v. 2); she added to the Word by adding “touch it” (v. 3); and she changed the Word by making God's “you shall surely die” into “lest you die” (v. 3, nkjv). In v. 6 (nkjv) we see the tragic operation of the lust of the flesh (“good for food”), the lust of the eyes (“pleasant to the eyes”), and the pride of life (“desirable to make one wise”)—see 1 John 2:15–17. It is difficult to sin alone. Something in us makes us want to share the sin with others. Adam deliberately sinned and plunged the world into judgment (1 Tim. 2:14).

II. Condemnation (3:7–19)

A. Internal (vv. 7–13).

Immediately there came a loss of innocence and glory and a sense of guilt. They tried to cover their nakedness with their own works, garments that God did not accept (v. 21). Further, we see a loss of desire for fellowship with God. When they heard God approaching, they hid! Guilt, fear, and shame broke the fellowship with God that they had enjoyed before their disobedience. Note too that there was a growing attitude of self-defense: the man blamed the woman and the woman blamed the serpent. We see here the tragic internal effects of sin.

B. External (vv. 14–19).

It is likely that the serpent that Satan used was not the crawling creature that we know today. The name suggests brightness and glory, but because the creature yielded to Satan and shared in the temptation, it was judged and condemned to a lowly life in the dust. The woman's judgment involved multiple conception and pain in childbirth. She was made subject to her husband. Note that Paul suggests that Christian women who marry unsaved men may have special dangers in bearing children (1 Tim. 2:8–15). The judgment on man involved his work: paradise would be replaced by wilderness, and the joy of ministry in the garden by the sweat and toil in the field. It is not work that is God's penalty, because work is not sinful (2:15). It is the sweat and toil of work and the obstacles of nature that remind us of the fall of man. All creation is cursed and in bondage because of sin (Rom. 8:15–25).

C. Eternal (v. 15).

This is the first Gospel declared in the Bible: the good news that the woman's seed (Christ) would ultimately defeat Satan and his seed (Gal. 4:4–5). It is from this point on that the stream divides: Satan and his family (seed) oppose God and His family. God Himself put the enmity (hostility) between them, and God will climax the war when Satan is cast into hell (Rev. 20:10). Review the Parable of the Tares in Matt. 13, and note that Satan has children just as God does. In Gen. 4, Cain kills Abel, and 1 John 3:12 informs us that Cain was “of that wicked one”—a child of the devil. The OT is the record of the two seeds in conflict; the NT is the record of the birth of Christ and His victory over Satan through the cross.

III. Salvation (3:20–24)

The only Gospel Adam heard was what God said in 3:15, yet he believed it and was saved. How do we know he believed it? Because he called his wife's name “Eve” which means “life” or “lifegiver.” God had said that Adam and Eve would die, and Adam did die physically after 930 years. But he also died spiritually, in that he was separated from God because of sin. God promised the birth of a Savior through the woman, and Adam believed this promise and was saved. God did not change the physical consequences of sin, but he did remit the eternal consequences—hell.

The coats of skins in v. 21 are pictures of the salvation we have in Christ. There must be the shedding of blood, the offering of innocent life for the guilty. Adam and Eve had tried to cover their sin and shame with leaves (3:7), but these good works were not accepted by God. Nor does He accept such works today!

Garments in the Bible are often a picture of salvation. See Isa. 61:10 and Zech. 3. The prodigal son was clothed afresh when he came home (Luke 15:22). The garments of self-righteousness and good works are but filthy rags in God's sight (Isa. 64:6). Note that God wanted Adam and Eve to be covered; He approved their sense of shame. It is always a sign of degeneration when a people reverse this and go back to nakedness. “Modest apparel” is always God's standard (1 Tim. 2:9).

Verses 22–24 show a strange action of the grace of God: He drove the man and woman out of the garden! They had forfeited their right to the tree of life by disobeying God. If they had eaten of that tree, they would have lived forever in their sinful state. This would mean that the Savior, the Second Adam, could not come to die to deliver humans from sin. Thus, in driving Adam and Eve out of paradise, God was showing His grace and mercy to the whole human race. The sword that God placed at the garden barred the way. It is possible to translate this “a swordlike flame”—the fire of God that speaks of His holiness (Heb. 12:29).

Romans 5 and 1 Cor. 15:42–49 explain the contrasts between the first Adam and the Last Adam, Christ. Adam was made from the earth, but Christ came down from heaven. Adam was tempted in a perfect garden, while Christ was tempted in a terrible wilderness. Adam deliberately disobeyed and plunged the human race into sin and death, but Christ obeyed God and brought righteousness. As a thief, Adam was cast out of paradise. Speaking to a thief, Jesus said, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43, nkjv).

Note that in Romans 5 we have several “much more” statements (9, 15, 17, 20), indicating that the death of Christ did not simply put us back to where Adam was. It gave us much more than Adam ever had. We are kings and priests unto God and will reign with Christ forever!

Genesis 4

Cain is the chief actor in this chapter, and his character and conduct are revealed in four different aspects.

I. The Worshiper (4:1–5)

God's promise in 3:15 and Adam's faith in 3:20 are both seen in 4:1. Eve brought new life into the world, and she thought her child was the promised Seed. "I have gotten a man—the Lord!" is a possible translation. "Cain" means "acquired"—the baby boy was looked upon as a gift from God. Abel means "vanity, vapor"—it suggests the futility of life apart from God, or perhaps Eve's disappointment that Cain was not the promised Seed. From the very beginning, we see a division of work: as Cain is identified with the ground, Abel with the flock. God had already cursed the ground (3:17), so Cain is identified with that curse.

This earliest family must have known a definite place for worship, for both sons brought offerings to the Lord. It may be that the glory of God tabernacled at the tree of life, with the way guarded by the cherubim (3:24). Hebrews 11:4 indicates that Abel brought his offering by faith; and Rom. 10:17 teaches that "faith comes by hearing, (nkjv)." This means that God must have taught Adam and his family how to approach Him, and 3:21 indicates that sacrifice of blood was involved. Hebrews 9:22 states that there must be the shedding of blood before there can be the remission of sin, but Cain brought a bloodless offering from the cursed earth. His offering may have been sincere, but it was not accepted. He had no faith in God's Word or dependence on the sacrifice of a substitute. God probably "answered by fire" (Lev. 9:24) and burned up Abel's offering, but Cain's offering lay there on the altar.

Cain had a form of godliness and religion, but he denied the power (2 Tim. 3:5). First John 3:12 indicates that Cain was a child of the devil, and this means he practiced a false righteousness of the flesh, not the righteousness of God through faith. Jesus called the self-righteous Pharisees "children of the devil" and blamed their kind for the death of Abel (Luke. 11:37–51). Jude 11 talks about "the way of Cain," which is the way of religion without blood, religion based on religious good works and self-righteousness. There are only two religions in the world today: (1) that of Abel that depends on the blood of Christ and His finished work on the cross; and (2) that of Cain that depends on good works and man-pleasing religion. One leads to heaven, the other to hell!

II. The Murderer (4:6–8)

James 1:15 warns us that sin begins in a small way, but grows and leads to death. So it was with Cain. We see disappointment, anger, jealousy, and finally murder. The hatred in his heart led to murder with his hand (Matt. 5:21–26). God saw Cain's faithless heart and fallen countenance and warned him that sin was crouching like a wild beast, waiting to destroy him. God said, "Its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." Alas, Cain fed the wild beast of temptation, then opened the door and invited him in! Cain invited his brother to talk with him, then killed him in cold blood. A child of the devil (1 John 3:12), Cain, like his father, was a liar and a murderer (John 8:44). In chapter 3, we have man sinning against God by disobeying His Word; in chapter 4, we have man sinning against man.

III. The Wanderer (4:9–16)

"Adam, where are you?" "Where is Abel your brother?" How significant are these first two questions in the Bible! Sin always finds us out, even though we try (like Cain) to lie about our sin. Abel's blood cried out for vengeance; Christ's blood cries out peace and forgiveness (Heb. 12:24). God had

cursed the serpent and the ground; now He curses Cain. "You are cursed away from the earth ..." (v. 11) is a suggested translation. In other words, the ground would not yield increase to Cain, and he would have to wander from place to place in order to live. He would be a fugitive, a wanderer.

Cain did not repent of his sin; instead, he showed remorse and despair. Like his parents, he blamed God. "You have driven me out!" (v. 14, nkjv) He was rejected by heaven and refused by earth! He was condemned to a restlessness that could be cured only by faith.

Note also Cain's fear and hopelessness: "Anyone who finds me will kill me!" (v. 14, nkjv) In grace, God promised to protect Cain and gave him a sign (mark) to verify His promise. (It is not likely that there was a literal mark on Cain; rather, God gave a sign to Cain to assure him. What grace!) Why did God release Cain? For one thing, Cain became a "walking sermon" on the grace of God and the tragic consequences of sin. What a picture of humankind today: restless, hopeless, wandering, defeated!

Did Cain spend the rest of his life wandering? No! He settled down and built a city! We have here the origin of "civilization"—man's substitute for God's spiritual gifts.

IV. The Builder (4:17–26)

"Nod" means "to stray, to wander", so the very land of Cain's choice speaks of his wandering away from God. He went away from the presence of God (4:16); he had no need for a religion of blood. Cain certainly married one of his sisters, for by then there were many descendants of Adam (5:3 indicates 130 years had passed). Abraham later married his half-sister; why could Cain not marry his full sister, especially in a day when sin had not yet taken its toll in the human body? His son's name "Enoch" means "initiation" and suggests a new beginning, but it was a beginning without God.

Evaluated from a human point of view, Cain's descendants are an admirable lot. Jabal ("wanderer") founded the science of agriculture (v. 20); Jubal founded "culture"—music; and Tubal-Cain founded the metal industries. In outward appearances, Cain's "city" was a great success, but God made it clear that He had rejected the whole thing. In v. 25, God gave Adam and Eve another seed—Seth—which means "the appointed, the substitute" (taking Abel's place). God did not try to reform the Cainites. He rejected them and ultimately would condemn them in the flood. As the Cainites were gradually wandering away from the true worship of God, the Sethites were returning to Him (v. 26) and establishing again their worship of the Lord. Civilization today is Cainite in origin. It has such elements as agriculture, industry, arts, great cities, and religion without faith in the blood of Christ. Also, like Cain's civilization of old, it will be destroyed. We still have boasting murderers like Lamech, and we still have people (like Lamech) who violate the sacred vows of marriage. "As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:37, nkjv). Men still reject divine revelation and depend on their own human resources. The true Christian does not belong to this "world system" that is passing away (1 John 2:15–17), and should not get involved with it (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).

We must take special note of "Lamech's Message" (vv. 23–24). This passage is not clear, and not all Bible students interpret it the same way. Lamech was the seventh from Adam on Cain's side and was a man who displeased God, while Enoch was the seventh from Adam on Seth's side (5:3–27) and walked with God and pleased God (Heb. 11:5). Note that the Cainite line even copied the names of the true believers in Seth's line (Enoch—Enos; Irad—Jared; Mehujael—Mahalaleel; Lamech—Lamech). Some suggest that Lamech had been wounded by a young man, so had killed his attacker in self-defense. If God had avenged Cain, who was guilty of gross murder, surely He would defend Lamech who had killed in self-defense. Another suggestion is that Tubal-Cain had devised the first weapons of brass and iron and that Lamech had proudly demonstrated them to his wives. The Hebrew verbs can be translated in the future tense: "I will slay anyone who wounds me and will not need God's protection, for with these weapons I can avenge myself seventy-seven fold!" Seen in this light, it is the first expression of arrogant defiance and warfare in the Bible.

Genesis 5–8

These chapters deal with the flood and the faith of Noah. Since it is impossible for us to mine all of the spiritual treasures here, we will limit ourselves to four aspects of this important event in Bible history.

I. The Flood Considered Historically

A. *The fact of the flood.*

That there actually was a flood is proved by the Genesis record, as well as by Christ (Matt. 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–27), the prophets (Isa. 54:9), and the apostles (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:6). Archaeologists tell us that many ancient civilizations have a flood tradition with details paralleling the Genesis account. It is likely that these stories (involving their fanciful gods and goddesses) were corruptions of the original history of the flood that was handed down from generation to generation.

B. *The purpose of the flood.*

Stated in 6:5–13, because people had become corrupt, and the earth was filled with violence, God sent the flood in order to destroy humankind. There must always be judgment and death before there can be a new beginning. We will study the details later.

C. *The schedule of the flood.*

If we count the year of Adam's creation as 1, then Noah was born in the year 1056. Genesis 6:3 indicates that God gave Noah 120 years to build the ark and preach (1 Peter 3:20), which means he was 480 years old when he started (7:11). This would be the year 1536. The flood came in Noah's 600th year, which would be 1656, and in the year 1657, his 601st year, Noah and his family were back on dry ground (8:13ff). The events on the ark began on the tenth day of the second month (2/10) of 1656, when Noah and His family entered the ark (7:1–9). The floods came on 2/17 (7:10–11); the rains stopped on 3/26 (7:12); and the ark rested on Mt. Ararat on 7/17 (8:1–4). On 10/1 the family could see the tops of the mountains (8:5). On 11/11, Noah sent out the raven (8:6–9). On 11/18, he sent the dove, which brought back the olive branch (8:10–11). A week later on 11/25, Noah again sent out the dove and it did not return (8:12). On the first day of the first month of the next year (1657), Noah removed the covering of the ark and surveyed the earth (8:13). On 2/27, they all left the ark (8:14ff).

D. *The ark.*

It was not a boat, but was rather a "floating box" made of cypress wood and pitched with bitumen. If we use a 24" cubit, the ark's size would be 600 feet long, 100 feet wide, and 60 feet high. With an 18" cubit the size becomes x x 45. In either case, the ark was large enough to hold the collection of animals, the food needed, and the members of Noah's family. We do not know how many species of animals there were in that day. Note that 6:20 indicates that God brought the animals to Noah. There were three levels to the ark, with a window either in the roof of the top level or running all around the top level (6:16); and there was one door.

E. *The flood itself.*

The deluge was caused by rain falling and water erupting from under the earth (7:11). One can well imagine the tremendous effects this would have on the surface of the earth, as well as on the climate. Gigantic tidal waves followed these eruptions. Genesis 2:5–6 suggests that the falling of rain was something new on the earth in Noah's time, which makes the faith of Noah even more wonderful.

II. The Flood Considered Typically

The ark is an illuminating picture of our salvation in Christ (see 1 Peter 3:18–22). The salvation and the ark were planned by God, not invented by humans. There is only one way of salvation and there was only one door in the ark. The ark was made of wood, speaking of the humanity of Christ: He had to be born as man in order to save us. The word for "pitch" in 6:14 is the same as the word "atonement" used later in the OT. God invited Noah and his family into the ark (7:1); then, once they were in, God shut them in so that they were secure (7:16). The ark saved not only humankind, but also the creatures within it, just as Christ's death will one day deliver creation from the bondage of sin (Rom. 8:18–23). The ark saved Noah and his family from judgment because they believed God's promise (Heb. 11:7); Christ saves us from the wrath to come as we believe Him. First Peter 3:18–22 connects the ark with the resurrection of Christ; the waters buried the old world but raised Noah to a new life. Noah was faithful to obey all that God commanded; Jesus said, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). Noah was brought safely through the floods; Christ went through the flood of suffering (Ps. 42:7) and came out in victory. Noah went out of the ark, the head of a new creation with his family; and Christ came out of the tomb, the Head of the new creation, and the Father of a new family.

Noah went through the judgment and was kept safe, just as the believing Jewish remnant will go through the Tribulation to establish the kingdom on the earth. Enoch was raptured before the judgment came (5:21–24; Heb. 11:5), just as the church will be raptured before the wrath of God is poured out upon the world. See 1 Thes. 1:10 and 5:9–10.

III. The Flood Considered Prophetically

Christ teaches that the days before the rapture and the Tribulation will be like the days of Noah (Luke 17:26, Matt. 24:37–39). We are living in the "days of Noah" today. We see such parallels as the multiplication of people in the "population explosion" (6:1); moral corruption of every kind (6:5); violence (6:11, 13); the expansion of arts and industry (4:16–22); lack of conscience, even for murder (4:23–24); and true believers being in a minority (6:8–10). But keep in mind that "the days of Noah" were also days of witness. In fact, God had told Enoch that judgment was coming, and he warned the people (Jude 14–15). Methuselah, Enoch's son, was born in the year 687 and lived 969 years. He died in the year 1656—the very year the flood came! In other words, God gave the wicked world 969 years of grace. And for the last 120 years of that period, Noah was preaching and preparing the ark (Gen. 6:3; 1 Peter 3:20). Today, God warns that judgment is coming (2 Peter 3—fire not water), but few listen, and even fewer believe.

IV. The Flood Considered Practically

We see in the flood account at least these six practical considerations: (1) God must punish sin. There must be death to the old before He can establish the new. (2) God gives warnings but eventually His patience ends and judgment comes. (3) God has always saved people the same way: by grace (6:8), through faith (Heb. 11:7). (4) True faith leads to obedience (6:22; 7:5). (5) True witness demands separation from sin, and Noah and his family kept themselves unspotted from the world. (6) Whether "the sons of God" in 6:1–4 were angels or the family of Seth, the same lesson is seen: God condemns compromise and rebellion, but rewards the separated saint.

Genesis 9–11

I. God's Covenant with Noah (9:1–17)

The word covenant means “to cut,” referring to the cutting of the sacrifices which was a definite part of making an agreement (see Gen. 15:9ff). Through Noah, God made an agreement with all mankind, and its terms still stand today. The basis of the covenant was the shed blood of the sacrifice (8:20–22), just as the basis of the New Covenant is the shed blood of Christ.

The terms of the covenant are these: (1) God will not destroy mankind with a flood of waters; (2) man may eat animal flesh, but not blood (see Lev. 17:10ff); (3) there is fear and terror between man and beast; (4) human beings are responsible for human government, seen in the principle of capital punishment (see Rom. 13:1–5). God set apart the rainbow as the token and pledge of the covenant. This does not mean that the rainbow first appeared at that time, but only that God gave it a special meaning when He made this covenant. The rainbow is a product of sunshine and storm, and its colors remind us of the “manifold (many-colored) grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). The rainbow appears to be a bridge between heaven and earth, reminding us that in Christ, God bridged the chasm that separated man from God. We meet the rainbow again in Ezek. 1:28 and Rev. 4:3.

We must keep in mind that the covenant was with Noah's “seed” after him, and this includes us today. It is for this reason that most Christian people have supported capital punishment (9:5–6). God had promised to avenge Cain (4:15), but in this covenant with Noah God gave men the responsibility of punishing the murderer.

II. Noah's Curse upon Canaan (9:18–29)

A. *The sin.*

It was a seasoned saint, over 600 years old, and not a young prodigal, that fell into this sin and shame. The Hebrew text suggests that Noah deliberately uncovered himself in a shameful manner; intemperance and impurity often go together. Some excuse Noah by suggesting that the new atmospheric conditions of the earth since the flood would lead to the fermentation of wine, and that Noah did not fully know what he was doing. But the Bible does not excuse the sins of the saints. This is the third failure on the part of man. He had disobeyed in Eden, resulting in his expulsion; he had corrupted the earth, resulting in the flood; and now he had become a shameful drunk! To make matters worse, Ham did not respect his father; instead, he “told with delight” what Noah had done.

B. *The curse.*

Noah learned what Ham had done and pronounced his famous curse. (This is the third curse in Genesis. See 3:14–19 and 4:11.) The fact that he curses Canaan, Ham's youngest son (10:6), suggests that the boy was involved in the sin along with his father and that God would punish the sins of both the father and the son. Canaan and his descendants (nations named in 10:15–20) were to be the lowest of servants to their brethren. It is easy to see that they were ultimately made slaves by the Jews and Gentiles. Of course, the Shemites (Semites) were the Jews. Their tribes are listed in 10:21–32, and 11:10–26 traces the line to Abraham. The descendants of Japheth are the Gentiles (10:1–5). The enslavement of Canaan's descendants is mentioned in Gen. 15:13–21 with 10:15–20. We are not told how the various racial distinctions appeared, but Acts 17:26 teaches that God made all men of “one blood.”

C. *The blessing*

Noah blessed the Jews (Shem) and gave the Canaanites to them as their servants. He promised that the Gentiles (Japheth) would be spread abroad, but that (spiritually speaking) they would dwell in the Jewish tents. Paul explains this in Romans 9–11.

III. Nimrod's Confederation against God (11:1–9)

A. *The dictator (10:6–14).*

Nimrod was a grandson of Ham through Cush, and his name means “rebel.” He was a mighty tyrant in the sight of God, the first dictator. The word “hunter” does not refer to the hunting of animals, but rather to the hunting of men. He was the founder of the Babylonian empire and the organizer of the enterprise that led to the construction of the tower of Babel. History informs us that Nimrod and his wife devised a new religion built around “the mother and child.” For details, read Alexander Hislop's book *The Two Babylons* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1956). “Babylon” in the Bible symbolizes rebellion against God and confusion in religion. We see Babylon opposing the people of God throughout the Bible, culminating in the “Great Babylon” of Rev. 17–18.

B. *The rebellion.*

God had commanded men to replenish the earth (9:1, 7, 9), but they decided to settle down on the plain of Shinar where Babylon was located (10:8–10). This was deliberate rebellion against God's Word. They journeyed “from the east” which suggests that they were turning their backs on the light. They decided to unite and build both a city and a tower. Their purposes were to (1) maintain unity in opposition to God, and (2) make a name for themselves. This entire operation is a foregleam of the final opposition of man (and Satan) against Christ, centered in the Babylon of Rev. 17–18. Men will unite then in a world church and world political organization; they will be led by the Antichrist, the last world dictator; and their plans will be frustrated. It is interesting to note that today the world is rapidly moving toward the “one world” concept, thanks to the United Nations and other international alliances.

C. *The judgment.*

God knew the designs of the rebels and judged them. The Godhead held another conference (see 1:26 and 3:22) and decided to confound the languages of the workers, thus making it impossible for them to work together. This was really an act of mercy as well as judgment, for had they persisted in their plan, a more terrible judgment would have followed. The name “Babel” comes from a Hebrew word which means “gate of God.” It sounds like the word *balal* which means “confusion.” The description of God's action here explains the origin of the languages of mankind. It has often been pointed out that Pentecost was a reversal of Babel—there was true spiritual unity among God's people; they spoke with other tongues but were understood; and their work glorified God, not men.

IV. God's Call of Abraham (11:10–32)

We had the family tree of Shem in 10:21–32, but here the writer repeats the line to show how Abraham fits into the plan. He takes the line to Terah, the father of Abraham (11:26). We see here another evidence of divine election: God chose Abraham in His grace! He bypassed Ham and Japheth and chose Shem. Of Shem's five sons (10:22), God chose Arphaxad (11:10). And of Terah's three sons (11:26), He chose Abraham. This is the beginning of the Hebrew nation.

Genesis 12:1 indicates that the Lord had said (past tense) to Abraham, “Get out.” But 11:31–32 states that Abraham did not fully obey. Instead of leaving his father behind, he took him along (nkjv); and the pilgrimage was delayed at Haran, where Terah died. Often our half-way obedience

becomes costly, both in time and treasure. Abraham lost the time he could have spent walking with God, and he lost his father too. Abraham took Lot with him on the next stage of the journey, but Lot also had to be taken away from Abraham (13:5–14).

Hebrews 11:8–19 is a summary of the faith of Abraham. Someone has said that Abraham believed God when he did not know where (Heb. 11:8), when he did not know how (11:11), and when he did not know why (11:17–19).

We must emphasize again that God did not call Abraham because of his own merits. He had none. He was a citizen of an idolatrous city, Ur of the Chaldees. Had not God revealed Himself to him, he would have died an unbeliever. From a human point of view, God's choice of Abraham and Sarah—who had no children—was a foolish one. But ultimately it brought great glory to God and great blessing to the world.

Genesis 12–13:4

This chapter begins the account of Abraham's walk of faith. (His given name, of course, was Abram, "high father," which was changed to Abraham, "father of a multitude." We will use his more familiar name for the sake of convenience.) The flood had destroyed a corrupt civilization, but another sinful society soon took its place. God called one man to begin the fulfillment of His promise in Gen. 3:15, to send a Savior to the world. This man was of the line of Shem (11:10ff) and was the father of the Jewish nation. From this one man, God was to bless the whole world!

I. Abraham's Response of Faith (12:1–9)

A. *The covenant (vv. 1–3).*

God had called Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2–4), but he had lingered at Haran until the death of his father (11:27–32). God demands total separation to Himself, even if death must accomplish it. This call was completely of grace and the blessings of the covenant wholly from the Lord's goodness. God promised to give Abraham (1) a land; (2) a great name; (3) a great nation; and (4) a blessing that would spread to the whole world. It took a good deal of faith for Abraham to respond to these promises for he had no children, and he and his wife were getting old (11:30). Note the repeated "I will" from the lips of God. God would do it all if only Abraham would believe. Certainly God has fulfilled His promises; for Israel has her land (and will get more); the Jews have blessed all nations by giving us the Bible and Christ; and Abraham's name is revered by Jews, Moslems, Christians, and even unbelievers. The men of Babel wanted to make a name for themselves and failed (11:4); but Abraham trusted God and God gave him a great name!

B. *The compromise (vv. 4–6).*

"Lot went with him"—this was mistake number two. Lot's father, Haran, was dead (11:28), so Abraham took the young man under his protection, only to have him create serious problems. Later, God had to separate Lot from Abraham before He could advance His plan for the patriarch's life. Their long journey from Haran to Canaan is not recorded, but it certainly took faith and patience to complete it. It is easy to see that Abraham was a wealthy man, but that his wealth was no barrier to his walk with God. The travelers came to Shechem, "the place of the shoulder." How wonderful it is for the believer to live in "the place of the shoulder," where "underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27).

C. *The confession (vv. 7–9).*

Obedience always leads to blessing. After Abraham arrived in Canaan, the Lord appeared to Abraham to further assure him. Abraham did not hesitate to confess his faith before the heathen in the land. Wherever he went, he pitched his tent and built his altar. (See 13:3–4, 18.) The tent speaks of the pilgrim, the person who trusts God a day at a time and is always ready to move. The altar speaks of the worshiper who brings a sacrifice and offers it to God. Interestingly at Abraham's location, Bethel ("the house of God") was on the west, Ai ("the heap of ruins") was on the east, and he was traveling toward "the house of God." In 13:11, Lot turned his back on the house of God and took his journey eastward, back into the world with disastrous results. Also, whenever Abraham stepped out of God's will, he lost the tent and the altar.

II. Abraham's Lapse of Faith (12:10–20)

A. *The disappointment (v. 10).*

A famine in the place of God's leading! What a great disappointment this must have been to the pilgrims. God was testing their faith, to see if they were trusting the land or the Lord. Instead of remaining in Canaan and trusting God, they went down to Egypt, possibly at the suggestion of Lot (see 13:10). Egypt symbolizes the world, the life of self-confidence; Canaan illustrates the life of faith and victory. Egypt was watered by the muddy Nile river; Canaan received the fresh rains from God (see Deut. 11:10–12). Abraham abandoned his tent and altar and trusted in the world! See Isa. 31:1.

B. *The deception (vv. 11–13).*

One sin leads to another: first Abraham trusted Egypt; now he trusted his wife's lie to protect him. Genesis 20:13 makes it clear that Sarah was equally guilty with Abraham, and 20:12 indicates that the "lie" was really a half-truth, for she was his half-sister. It seems that Abraham was more concerned for his own safety than the safety of his wife—or the safety of the promised seed. Had Sarah been kept in that harem, God could not have fulfilled His promise! Without his tent and altar, Abraham was acting like the people of the world (Ps. 1:1–3).

C. *The discipline (vv. 14–20).*

What a shame that believing Abraham should be rebuked by an unbelieving king. Until he knew the truth about Sarah, Pharaoh "bestowed favors" upon Abraham, but once God stepped in and exposed the lie, Pharaoh had to ask them to leave. What a poor testimony the Christian is when he or she mingles with the world and compromises. Someone has said, "Faith is living without scheming." Abraham and all his descendants have needed to learn that lesson! Lot lived with the world and lost his testimony (19:12–14); and Peter sat by the enemy fire and denied his Lord.

III. Abraham's Return of Faith (13:1–4)

Christians enmeshed in the world cannot be happy with themselves. They must go back to the very place where they abandoned the Lord. This is repentance and confession, to feel sorry for sin and to make amends. Abraham could not have confessed his sin and remained in Egypt! No, he had to get back to the place of the tent and the altar, back to the place where he could call upon the Lord and receive blessing. This is a good principle for Christians to follow: go nowhere in this world where you must leave your testimony behind. Any place where we cannot build the altar and pitch the tent is out of bounds.

It seems that Abraham's restoration should have undone all his disobedience, but such is not the case. Certainly God forgave Abraham and restored him to fellowship, but God could not overrule the sad consequences of the trip to Egypt:

A. Lost time.

The weeks that Abraham and his household were away from the Lord were lost and could not be regained. All believers must pray to avoid such losses, "Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12, nkjv).

B. Lost testimony.

Could Abraham ever witness to Pharaoh of the true God, after deceiving him? Probably not. How sad it will be when we face God at the judgment seat of Christ and discover how many souls have gone to hell because of the poor testimony of carnal Christians!

C. Hagar's place in the family.

Sarah's maid, Hagar, came from Egypt (16:1ff), and brought untold trouble to the family. Of course, the suggestion that she bear a child came from Sarah, but the presence of Hagar helped to bring about the carnal scheme. Whatever we bring with us from Egypt (the godless world) will ultimately cause us trouble. We must be crucified to the world and make sure that the world is crucified to us (Gal. 6:14).

D. More wealth.

The increase in possessions helped to cause the later dispute between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. Later, Abraham would refuse the world's wealth (14:17–24).

E. Lot's enjoyment of Egypt.

This young man developed a taste for Egypt (13:10), and though Abraham took Lot out of Egypt, he could not take Egypt out of Lot! It is always tragic when a mature believer leads a younger Christian astray. In 12:8, Lot shares Abraham's tent and altar, but when Lot comes out of Egypt, he has only tents, no altar (13:5). No wonder Lot gravitated toward Sodom—and ended up a moral and spiritual wreck.

Genesis 13:5–14:24

We begin here the tragic account of Lot's backsliding and failure. Were it not for 2 Peter 2:7–8, we might wonder whether Lot was even saved. He is an illustration of the worldly believer who loses everything to the fire of judgment (1 Cor. 3:11–15). Saved, yet so as by fire!

I. The Conflict (13:5–7)

Lot was walking in the flesh, and Abraham was walking in the Spirit. This always leads to conflict. The outward cause was increased wealth; the real cause was Lot's unbelief and carnality. Christ is a divider (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). His presence brings conflict between people of the same family

(Luke 12:49–53). The conflict with Lot must have been a burden to Abraham and Sarah at the same time as a poor testimony to the heathen then living in the land.

II. The Choice (13:8–18)

People reveal their true selves by the choices they make. Note what Lot reveals here:

A. *His pride (vv. 8–9).*

The younger should submit to the elder (1 Peter 5:5), yet Lot put himself ahead of Abraham. What a gracious man Abraham was. He was anxious to make peace (Ps. 133). While Abraham was concerned about maintaining a good testimony, Lot was concerned only about himself. But “pride goes before destruction” (Prov. 16:18, nkjv), and Lot was to lose everything!

B. *His unbelief (v. 10a).*

He “lifted up his eyes”—he lived by sight, not by faith. Had Lot consulted God, he would have discovered that Sodom was on the agenda to be destroyed, but instead he trusted his own sight and chose the wealthy, wicked city.

C. *His worldliness (v. 10b).*

The land Lot saw was “like the land of Egypt”—that was all that mattered! Lot was walking according to the flesh, living for the things of the world. The area around Sodom looked well-watered and fruitful to Lot, but to God, it was wicked (v. 13). Unbelievers today, like Lot, anchor their hopes on this world and laugh at the idea that God will one day destroy the world with fire (2 Peter 3).

D. *His selfishness (v. 11).*

Lot's success was due mainly to Abraham's kindness, yet the young man left his generous uncle and tried to take “the best” for himself. Of course, God wanted to separate Lot and Abraham (12:1), but from a human standpoint, it was a painful separation.

E. *His heedlessness (v. 12).*

First, Lot looked toward Sodom. Then he moved toward Sodom. Before long (14:12 and 19:1), he was living in Sodom. Verse 11 tells us that Lot journeyed east; instead of walking with the light, he went toward the darkness (Prov. 4:18).

While Lot was getting farther from the Lord, Abraham was drawing closer! Lot was becoming a friend of the world (James 4:4); Abraham was becoming the friend of God (James 2:23). God told Abraham to lift up his eyes (see v. 14–15) and behold the entire land. The people of the world claim what their eyes can see, while the people of faith claim what God's eyes can see! Lot took a part of the land, but Abraham was given all of the land. God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him (Matt. 6:33). God promised to bless Abraham's seed, but Lot's family was either destroyed in Sodom or defiled in the cave (19:12–38). Verse 17 makes it clear that the believer must step out on God's promises and claim them by faith (Josh. 1:3). Lot had lost his altar and would soon lose his tent (19:30), but Abraham still had his tent and altar. It pays to walk by faith and trust the Word of God!

III. The Captive (14:1–12)

Archaeologists have confirmed the historical accuracy of this account of the first war in the Bible. When Lot moved into Sodom (v. 12), he lost the protection of “the Judge of all the earth” (18:25) and had to suffer the consequences. Lot followed the path of friendship with the world (James 4:4), then love of the world

(1 John 2:15–17), then conformity to the world (Rom. 12:2), and finally, judgment with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). Lot thought that Sodom was a place of peace and protection; however, it turned out to be a place of warfare and danger! Saints rarely are “captured by the world” suddenly. They enter into the place of danger by degrees. With Lot, the process began when he adopted Egypt as his standard and began to walk by sight instead of by faith. He preferred the people of the world to his godly uncle, and the houses of Sodom to the tents of God. The result: he was captured!

IV. The Conquest (14:13–24)

Godly Abraham was in the place of safety, even though he lived in a tent. Hearing of Lot's plight, Abraham did the generous thing and went to rescue him. Only the separated believer has the power to help the backslider, and it is to such a faithful saint that the backslider turns when in trouble. In this chapter, Abraham delivers Lot by his sword. By faith, he overcomes the enemy, covering 120 miles to do it. See 1 John 5:1–4. In 19:29 Abraham delivers Lot by his prayers (18:23–33). A worldly Christian is truly fortunate if he has a dedicated loved one praying for him!

Following the victory, Abraham faced a greater temptation as he met the King of Sodom. It is usually true that Satan tempts us immediately after a great spiritual victory. Satan met Christ in the wilderness after His baptism. Elijah fled in fear after his great work of faith on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 19). The King of Sodom wanted to bargain with Abraham and get him to compromise by accepting the wealth of Sodom, but Abraham refused. The wealth of Egypt had proved a snare. The wealth of Sodom would be worse. Had Abraham not been on his guard, he would have fallen for this subtle temptation and would have taken all the glory away from God. The people would have said, “Abraham rescued Lot for what he could get out of it, not because of his faith and love. Abraham refuses to live in Sodom with Lot, but he enjoys the goods of Sodom just the same.” Abraham would have lost his testimony.

Abraham ignored the king of Sodom, but he honored the king of Salem. Hebrews 5–7 makes it clear that Melchizedek (“king of righteousness”) is a type of Christ, our heavenly High Priest. As King of Salem (“peace”) Christ gives us peace through His own righteousness, made possible by His death on the cross. What an encouragement it is to see Melchizedek meeting Abraham just when the king of Sodom tempts him! As King and Priest, Christ is able to give us “grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). The bread and wine (v. 18) typify Christ's body and shed blood, for it is the cross that makes possible the heavenly priesthood of Christ. Melchizedek met Abraham, fed him, and blessed him. What a wonderful Savior!

Abraham honored Melchizedek by paying him tithes of all. This is the first instance of tithing in the Bible, and it occurs years before the giving of the Mosaic Law. Hebrews 7:4–10 indicates that these tithes were paid (in type) to Christ, suggesting that believers today are following Abraham's example as they bring tithes to the Lord. Abraham refused the riches of the world but shared his wealth with the Lord, and God richly blessed him.

Did this battle and night of danger bring Lot to his senses? Alas, it did not! In 19:1 we see him right back in Sodom. Lot's heart was in Sodom, so that is where his body had to go.

Genesis 15–17

In these chapters we have a rich mine of spiritual truth that reaches into the NT, particularly to Romans and Galatians. God had outlined His promises in **12:1–3** and expanded them in 13:14–18, but at this point, He reveals the covenant promises more fully. This covenant has to do with Abraham's son and the coming of the promised Seed, Christ. It also deals with the land of Canaan and the wonderful program God has for His people, Israel.

I. The Terms of the Covenant (15)

A. *The setting.*

Abraham had just defeated the kings (chap. 14) and overcome a great temptation from the King of Sodom. Now God stepped in to encourage him. How wonderful that Christ comes to us when we need Him! (14:18) God is our protection (shield) and provision (reward); we need never fear. Abraham did not need the protection of the King of Sodom or the treasures he offered. Abraham had all he needed in God.

B. *The supplication.*

Abraham did not want a reward; he wanted an heir. He was now 85 years old, and for 10 years he had been waiting for his promised son to be born. If he had no son, all his inheritance would fall to Eliezer, his steward. Had not God promised in 12:2 (nkjv), "I will make you a great nation"? Then why was He not fulfilling His promise? God answered Abraham's supplication by lifting his eyes from himself and his steward to the heavens (v. 5). Verse 6 is a key verse in the Bible which can be translated: "And he said AMEN to the Lord, and He put it to his account for righteousness" (see Gal. 3:6; Rom. 4:3; James 2:23). How was Abraham saved? Not by keeping the Law, for the Law had not yet been given, nor by circumcision, for that was not established until he was ninety-nine years old. He was saved by faith in God's Word.

C. *The sacrifice.*

Salvation is based on sacrifice, for the covenant requires the shedding of blood. It was customary in that day for the contracting parties in an agreement to walk between the pieces of the slain animals; this sealed the agreement. The sacrifices in v. 9 all speak of Christ and the cross. Abraham offered the sacrifices and labored to keep Satan (the birds in v. 11, Matt. 13:4, 19) away. But nothing really happened until Abraham went to sleep. Abraham never did walk between the pieces. It was God alone (15:17.) who went between the pieces; the covenant was all of grace and depended solely upon the Lord. Like Adam (2:21), Abraham was in a deep sleep and could do nothing to help God. When we are helpless God is able to do great things for us.

D. *The surety.*

Abraham wanted to know for sure what God would do (v. 8), and God met his need. Salvation is based on the sacrifice of Christ and the grace of God; assurance comes from the Word of God. God gave Abraham a capsule forecast of events: the sojourn of Israel in Egypt, their suffering in Egypt, their deliverance in the fourth generation (see Ex. 6:16–26), and their possession of the Promised Land. Note that God says, "I have given this land" (v. 18), and not, "I will give" as in 12:7. God's promises are as good as His performances!

Note that at least seven words or phrases appear in this chapter for the first time: “The Word of the Lord” (v. 1); “Fear not” (v. 1); reward (v. 1); heir and inherit (vv. 3, 7); believe, counted, righteousness (all in v. 6). This chapter shows us that there can be no heirship without sonship (Rom. 8:16–17), no righteousness without faith (Rom. 4:3ff), no assurance without promises, and no blessing without suffering. It had to become dark before Abraham could see God’s stars!

II. The Test of the Covenant (16)

God had made the covenant, and God would fulfill it. All Abraham and Sarah had to do was wait by faith (Heb. 6:12). Alas, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak! In the previous chapter, Abraham listened to God and exercised faith, but here he listened to his wife and revealed his unbelief. He ceased to walk in the Spirit and began to walk in the flesh. We have seen that “faith is living without scheming,” but at this point both of them tried to help God accomplish His plan. This explains why God had to wait until they were old before He gave them the child. They had to be dead in themselves before He could work (Heb. 11:11–12).

In v. 2 Sarah blames God for her barren condition and hints that He is not good to them (see 3:1–6). She turns to the world for help—to Hagar, the Egyptian—but the whole scheme fails. The works of the flesh now appear (Gal. 5:16–26).

God did not recognize the marriage. He called Hagar “Sarah’s maid” (v. 8). This is the first mention of the Angel of the Lord in the OT, and is none other than Christ. God cared for Hagar, instructed her to submit to Sarah, and promised that her son, Ishmael, would be a great man, but a wild man. “Ishmael” means “God will hear” (see v. 11).

When Isaac, Sarah’s son, entered the family, there was no room for Ishmael and he was cast out (21:9ff). Eventually, Ishmael fathered twelve sons (25:13–15), and their descendants have been enemies of the Jews for centuries. Galatians 4:21–31 teaches that Sarah pictures the New Covenant and Hagar the Old Covenant. Hagar was a slave, and the Old Covenant enslaved people (Acts 15:10); Sarah was a free woman and Christ makes us free (Gal. 5:1ff). Ishmael was born of the flesh and could not be controlled. Likewise, the Law appeals to the flesh but cannot change it or control it. Isaac was born of the Spirit, a child of promise (Gal 4:23) who enjoyed liberty.

Do not miss the practical lessons here: whenever we run ahead of God, there is trouble. The flesh loves to help God, but true faith is shown in patience (Isa. 28:16). We cannot mix faith and flesh, law and grace, promise and self-effort.

III. The Token of the Covenant (17)

There are thirteen years of silence between Ishmael’s birth and the events of this chapter. God had to wait for Abraham and Sarah to die to self so that His resurrection power might be displayed in their lives. God revealed Himself as “God Almighty”—*El Shaddai*, “the all-sufficient One.” Note the repetition of “my covenant” in this chapter. Its fulfillment rests upon God, not upon man. Note too the repeated “I will” statements.

A. *The new names.*

“Abram” means “high father”; “Abraham” means “father of a multitude.” “Sarai” is said to mean “contentious”; but “Sarah” means “a princess.” Their new names were preparation for the new blessing about to enter their home. Only the grace of God could take two idol-worshiping heathen and make godly kings and queens out of them!

B. The new sign.

This is the first mention of circumcision in the Bible. Nowhere does the OT teach that circumcision saves a man. It is but the outward symbol of the covenant between God and men. It was to remind them of the inward circumcision of the heart that accompanies true salvation (Deut. 10:16 and 30:6; Jer. 4:4; and see Rom. 4:11 and Gal. 5:6). The ritual was to be performed on the eighth day (v. 12), and significantly, eight is the number of resurrection. Sad to say, the Jews depended on the fleshly ritual and not the inner reality (Acts 15:5). Believers today are in the New Covenant and are the true circumcision (Phil. 3:1–3), which is experienced spiritually through the death of Christ (Col. 2:9–15). The entire body of sin (the old nature) has been put off, and we may live in the Spirit, not in the flesh.

Abraham's laughter in v. 17 was that of joyful faith; Sarah's (18:12) was that of unbelief. "Isaac" means "laughter." God rejects Ishmael and establishes His covenant with Isaac and his seed; however, in grace He does appoint special blessing for Ishmael.

Genesis 18–20

Three visits are recorded in these chapters, and each one carries a spiritual lesson.

I. Christ's Visit with Abraham (18)

Verses 17–22 make it clear that the Lord Jesus Christ was one of the three heavenly visitors; note also Abraham's words in v. 3. The great theme of this chapter is the believer's fellowship with Christ, for Abraham was "the friend of God" (James 2:23). In chapter 19 we will see Lot, the friend of the world.

A. Abraham's communion with Christ (vv. 1–8).

These verses picture the believer in loving communion with Christ. Abraham is in Mamre, which means "fatness"; he is enjoying the fullness of God's blessing. The tent speaks of his pilgrim life; "the heat of the day" indicates that he is walking in the light (1 John 1). His haste proves his loving desire to please the Lord. And he spares no pains to make Christ feel at home. Paul prays in Eph. 3:17, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts," which literally means "That Christ may settle down and feel at home in your hearts." How important it is for the Christian to make Christ feel at home. He yearns to have communion with us.

B. Sarah's confession of unbelief (vv. 9–15).

The birth of Isaac is connected with laughter. In fact, the name "Isaac" means "laughter." Abraham had laughed in joyful faith when he heard the news that God would give him a son (17:15–18), but here Sarah seems to laugh in carnal unbelief. Why should we doubt the promises of God? "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Note Mary's faith in Luke 1:34, when she asked, "How shall this be?" Alternatively, Sarah was saying, "How can this be?" When Isaac was born, however, Sarah did laugh in spiritual joy (21:6–7).

C. Christ's confidence in Abraham (vv. 16–22).

The angels left and went to Sodom, but Christ stayed behind to visit with Abraham. What a scene! Christ would not hide anything from His friend. See John 15:14–15, where Christ promises to reveal

His will to His friends. Read also Ps. 25:9–14, and see how Abraham meets all the conditions given there. Abraham knew more about Sodom than Lot did, and Lot was living in Sodom! The separated obedient Christian knows more about this world than the atheistic philosophers do!

D. Abraham's concern for Lot (vv. 23–33).

Abraham had such love for Lot, in spite of the man's worldiness and unbelief. Note that Abraham was not pleading the grace of God, but the justice of God: how could God destroy the righteous with the wicked? (At Calvary, God punished the Righteous One instead of the wicked.) Persistently and tenderly Abraham interceded on behalf of Sodom. If only ten believers could be found, God said he would spare the whole city. Chapter 19 indicates that Lot had at least two married daughters (v. 14) and two single daughters (v. 30ff), so, with his wife and sons-in-law, there were eight in the family. If Lot had won his own family, plus only two neighbors, God would have spared a whole city! But he failed to meet even those conditions.

II. The Angels' Visit with Lot (19)

Christ did not accompany the angels; He would not have felt "at home" in the house of a worldly backslider. Second Peter 2:7–8 indicates that Lot was a saved man. He had union with the Lord, but not communion; sonship, but not fellowship. He was "saved, yet as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:14–15). Note that Lot had lost his tent. For at this time he lived in a house (v. 3), and there is no mention of the altar. It was evening when the angels arrived, and most of the chapter events take place at night. Lot was not walking in the light. Not only had worldly Lot lost his tent and altar and his fellowship with God, but he had also lost his spiritual standards: he dared to suggest that his single daughters go out in the street to satisfy the lusts of the crowd! Lot had also lost his testimony with his own family (vv. 12–14). Where did it all start? When he "lifted up his eyes" (13:10) and chose his land. He started walking by sight, not by faith, living for the things of the world. He must have married a worldly woman, for her heart was in Sodom and she could not bear to leave the city behind.

That morning dawned bright and beautiful. People started about their daily tasks—and then judgment came! The wicked cities were completely destroyed. Only Lot and his two single daughters escaped alive. Sodom's fate is a picture of the wrath to come. When men think there is peace and safety, then destruction will fall (1 Thes. 5). Lot's rescue, meanwhile, is an illustration of the rapture of the church prior to the pouring out of the wrath of God. The Lord rescued Lot for Abraham's sake (19:29), and He will deliver His church from the wrath to come for Jesus' sake (1 Thes. 1:10; 5:9).

Lot's final days were full of darkness and sin as he committed incest in a cave. He forsook a tent for a house in the city, and ended up in a cave, made drunk by his own daughters! The children of this horrible scene, the Moabites and Ammonites, have been enemies of the Jews for centuries, illustrating that the flesh fights against the Spirit. We must be sure we are in the will of God when we settle down with our family. Lot chose the wrong place and ruined himself and his loved ones.

It is interesting to contrast the two visits in chapters 18 and 19. Christ Himself visited Abraham, but only the angels went to Sodom to visit Lot. Christ had a message of joy for Abraham and Sarah, but the angels gave a message of judgment to Lot. Abraham was visited in the daytime but Lot in the evening. Abraham was at a tent door; Lot at the city gate. Abraham had power with God but Lot had no influence even with his own family. Abraham saw Sodom destroyed and lost nothing, but Lot lost everything. Only his life was spared. Abraham brought the world blessing, but Lot brought trouble into the world (the Ammonites and Moabites).

III. Abraham's Visit in Gerar (20)

Lot is forgotten, but the story of Abraham continues. "He who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17, nkjv). Unfortunately, this chapter records the repetition of an old sin—Abraham lying about his wife (see 12:10–20). Even the most dedicated saint must constantly be on his guard lest Satan trip him up.

Why was this sin repeated? Because Abraham had not judged it in his life. Certainly he had confessed it to the Lord and been forgiven, but confessing sin is not the same as judging sin. To judge our sins means to see them in their true light (as God sees them), to hate them, and to put them out of our lives. In v. 13 Abraham admitted that this sin came with him out of Ur of the Chaldees.

There is a difference between the believer and the unbeliever, even though the believer might commit sin. God plagued the heathen court but protected Abraham. God said to the ruler, "You are a dead man" (v. 3, nkjv), but He called Abraham a "prophet" (v. 7). This does not mean that believers have license to sin, but it does show that God is faithful even though we might be unfaithful (2 Tim. 2:12–13). Certainly Abraham suffered shame and reproach because of his sin, but God protects His own. Actually, had Abimelech taken Sarah, it would have altered God's plan for the birth of Isaac the very next year. Abraham's selfishness and unbelief almost wrecked his own life and the future of the Jewish nation. Sadly enough, his son Isaac would use this same scheme in later years (26:6ff), and with the same bitter results.

Genesis 21–22

These two chapters record three tests that came into the life of Abraham. True faith is always tested, for it is only through testing that we discover what kind of faith we have. Tests of faith are opportunities for growth and victory.

I. A Test from the Family (21:1–21)

It is often hardest to live for Christ at home. Abraham had already been tested in his family by his father (11:27–32), by his nephew Lot (chaps. 12–13), and by his wife (chap. 16). Here we see conflict between the two sons, Ishmael (who would be in his late teens according to 16:16), and Isaac (who was weaned at about the age of 3). At first, Isaac's birth brought joy and laughter (compare 21:6 with 17:17 and 18:12) for the very name "Isaac" means "laughter." But soon there was conflict as Ishmael constantly persecuted his younger brother. There are some valuable lessons here:

A. *The flesh vs. the Spirit.*

Ishmael was a child of the flesh (chap. 16), while Isaac was a child of promise, born miraculously. Isaac's presence in the home was not due to Abraham's strength (for Abraham was as good as dead, Rom. 4:19–20), but to God's promise and power. There is always conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, the old nature and the new, (Gal. 5:16–24). Salvation does not change the old nature, nor can the old nature be improved or disciplined (see Rom. 6–7). The only way to overcome the old nature is to accept God's estimate of it and obey God's Word. Abraham loved Ishmael and longed to hold to him (21:10–11, and see 17:18); but God said, "Cast him out!" Romans 6 informs us that our only victory over the flesh is crucifixion—reckoning ourselves dead. Christians who cater to the old nature (Rom. 13:14) will always have conflict and trouble.

B. The Old Covenant vs. the New Covenant.

Galatians 4:21–31 explains that these events with Ishmael and Isaac are an allegory that symbolizes God's Old Covenant with Israel and His New Covenant with the church. We may briefly summarize the main ideas as follows: Hagar symbolizes the Old Covenant of law, identified with the earthly Jerusalem in Paul's day. Sarah symbolizes the New Covenant of grace, identified with the heavenly Jerusalem. Ishmael was born of the flesh and was the son of a slave. Isaac was "born of the Spirit" and was the son of a freewoman. The two sons, then, picture the Jews under the slavery of law and the true Christians under the liberty of grace. Paul's argument is that God commanded Abraham to cast out Hagar (the Old Covenant) because His blessing was to be upon Isaac. All of this fits into Paul's argument in Gal. 3–4 that Christians today are not under the law.

C. Man's way vs. God's way.

The best way to solve any problem is God's way. Hagar had forgotten God's promise in 16:10; otherwise she would not have lost heart. God did sustain them and keep His Word. If we obey Him, He will always open the way and solve the problem.

II. A Test from the Neighbors (21:22–34)

Believers must be careful in the relationship to "those who are outside" (Col. 4:5; 1 Thes. 4:12; 1 Tim. 3:7, nkjv). Abraham had a good testimony before his unsaved neighbors, and the conflict over the well could have ruined it for good. Note that Abraham agreed to settle the problem in a businesslike way—"Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). Abraham and his neighbors exchanged the proper gifts and made the proper sacrifices for sealing a covenant. The place where the covenant was made was called Beersheba, "the well of the oath," and it became a place of prayer and communion for Abraham. It is important that tests that we face in the neighborhood or business be settled in a Christian way. See Rom. 12:18 for further clarification.

III. The Test from the Lord (22:1–24)

Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us, but God tests us to help bring out the best. See James 1:12–15. The most severe tests do not come from people, but from the Lord, and yet the greatest blessings always accompany them. God never tested Lot in this way. Lot lived on such a low level that Sodom and the world tested him. It is the saint that walks closest to the Lord that God tests the greatest for His glory.

A. The typical lesson.

This event is a wonderful type of Christ, the only Son who was willing to give His life to please His Father. Both Isaac and Christ were promised sons; both were born miraculously (of course, Christ was born of the Virgin Mary and was sinless); both brought joy to the heart of the father; both were born at the set time. Both were persecuted by their brethren and both were obedient unto death. Christ was crucified between two thieves, and the two young men went with Isaac (v. 3). Isaac questioned his father, and Jesus asked, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46, nkjv) Of course, Christ actually died, while Isaac was spared. However, in God's sight Isaac had "died." Hebrews 11:19 says that "in a figure" (that is, symbolically) Isaac was raised from the dead. Verse 19 indicates that Abraham returned to the waiting servants, but nothing is said about Isaac. This too is a type; for the next time we see Isaac, he is receiving his bride! (24:62ff) Even so Christ gave Himself on the cross and went back to heaven, and one day will come forth to receive His Bride, the church.

B. The practical lesson.

True faith is always tested. Of course, God did not want Isaac's life; He wanted Abraham's heart. Isaac was dear to Abraham, and God wanted to be sure that Isaac was not an idol standing between Him and Abraham. It was possible that Abraham was trusting Isaac to fulfill the promises and not trusting God. How did Abraham go through this test? For one thing, he rested on God's promises (Heb. 11:17–19). God had promised Abraham many descendants, and this promise could not be fulfilled unless Isaac lived or God raised him from the dead. Abraham knew that God would not lie, so he rested in His unchanging Word. "Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light." Abraham obeyed without delay. If we do the one thing God tells us to do, He will reveal the next step when the right time comes. God's answers never arrive a minute too late! God supplied a ram just when one was needed. This is why Abraham called the name of the place "Jehovah-Jireh—the Lord will see to it!"

C. The prophetic lesson.

This event took place on Mt. Moriah (22:2), the place where the temple was eventually built (2 Chron. 3:1). Isaac had asked, "Where is the lamb?" but God had supplied a ram. The answer to his question came in the Person of Christ: "Behold! The Lamb of God!" (John 1:29) Abraham had said, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (v. 14); Christ was seen in the temple, and then slain on Mt. Calvary. See John 8:56 also.

D. The doctrinal lesson.

James 2:14–26 discusses the relationship between faith and works, and James uses this event to illustrate his main point: true faith is always proved by obedience. Note the accurate translation of James 2:21—"Was not Abraham our father justified by works in that he offered his son upon the altar?" Abraham was not saved when he offered Isaac, for he had been saved years before when he trusted God's promise (Gen. 15:6). James is not telling us that we are saved by works or by sacrifices, but that the proof of saving faith is an obedient life (see Rom. 4:1–5 and Gal. 3:6ff).

Genesis 23–24

These two chapters stand in contrast to one another, for in one we have a funeral and in the other a wedding. The land of Canaan is "a land of hills and valleys" (Deut. 11:11); the Christian life has both its sorrows and joys. Yet in both, Abraham walked by faith (Heb. 11:13–17). Chapter 23 shows Abraham as a mourner, one who sorrows yet not "as others which have no hope" (1 Thes. 4:13ff). What a testimony he was before his lost neighbors! How different Sarah's burial was from the heathen burials of that day. How strange that the first plot of ground Abraham possessed in Canaan was a tomb! Genesis 49:31–33 indicates that six people were eventually buried there. Note too how carefully Abraham handled his business matters, making sure that everything was done "decently and in order." It is shameful when believers carry out questionable business deals, especially with those who are lost.

We will concentrate on chapter 24, which is rich in spiritual lessons. We see in Abraham, his servant, and Rebekah three wonderful examples.

I. Abraham's Example of Dedication (24:1–9)

At this point, Abraham is 140 years old (see 25:20 and 21:5). God has blessed him spiritually and materially, but he wants to be sure that the right bride is chosen for Isaac. Of course, we see here a picture of the Heavenly Father choosing a bride (the church) for His Son (Christ). How did Abraham know that God would provide the right woman for his son? He trusted the promises of God! Isaac was God's possession. Abraham had laid him on the altar years before, and he knew that God would supply the need. Otherwise, the promised seed could never be born.

The woman must come from within the family of God; she must not be one of the heathen women. No doubt there were many beautiful and talented Canaanite women who would have gladly married Isaac and shared his wealth, but this was against God's will. In vv. 6 and 8, Abraham emphasizes this fact; and we need to emphasize it today. "Only in the Lord" is the admonition of 1 Cor. 7:39–40 (see also 2 Cor. 6:14–18). It is tragic when parents push their children to marry "into society" and out of the blessing of the Lord! Abraham would rather his son remain single than go back to Ur for a wife, or take a wife from the Canaanite nations.

II. The Servant's Example of Devotion (24:10–49)

In a spiritual sense, the servant is a picture of the Holy Spirit whose work is to bring the lost to Christ and thus make up His bride. The servant's name is not given, for the ministry of the Spirit is to point to Christ and glorify Him. Note how often the servant mentioned his master and his master's son. He lived to please his master, for the word "master" is found twenty-two times in this chapter. The Spirit has been sent to represent Christ and do the Savior's will here on earth. The servant carried with him a portion of his master's wealth (vv. 10, 22, 30, 53), just as the Holy Spirit today "is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14, NIV), sharing with us but a small portion of the great wealth we shall one day enjoy in glory.

In addition, the servant is an example for us as we seek to serve the Lord. As already mentioned, the servant thought only of his master and his master's will. In fact, he was so anxious to finish his task that he cared nothing for food (v. 33; John 4:31–34). Too often we put physical things ahead of the spiritual. The servant received his orders from his master and did not change them one bit. He believed in prayer (see Isa. 65:24) and knew how to wait on the Lord. There is no place for rash impatience in the service of Christ.

The servant knew how to trust in the leading of the Lord: "I being in the way (of willing obedience), the Lord led me" (v. 27). See the claim of John 7:17. Once he knew what God's will was, he did not delay, but hastened to perform his task (v. 17). The hospitality of the home was delightful, but he had a job to do for his master and everything else could wait. Note too that the servant reported to his master when he returned home (v. 66), just as we must give an account when we see Christ. It is interesting to conjecture if the servant taught the bride as they journeyed, and revealed the bridegroom to her. "He shall glorify Me," said Christ concerning the Holy Spirit (John 16:14).

III. Rebekah's Example of Decision (24:50–67)

Again, we see a picture of Christ and His church. Rebekah was a pure virgin, just as the church will be when the marriage in heaven takes place (Rev. 19:7–8). Note that Rebekah identified with the flock, just as the church is both the bride of Christ and the flock (John 10:7–18).

Rebekah had to make an important decision: would she stay home with her family and continue to be a servant, or would she by faith believe the words of the servant and go to be with Isaac, a man she had never seen? Certainly there were obstacles in the way: her brother wanted her to stay awhile (v. 55); the trip would be long and difficult; Isaac was a pilgrim without a settled home; and she would have to leave her loved ones.

The world often advises the sinner to wait, just as Laban advised his sister. (Note, however, that when it came to getting material things, Laban could be in a hurry, vv. 28–31. We wonder if he invited the servant home out of courtesy or covetousness!) Sinners generally are not in a hurry about the salvation of their souls. Up to this point, Rebekah had been hastening (vv. 18–20, 28), but now they wanted her to slow down. “Seek the Lord while He may be found (Isa. 55:6, NIV).

We cannot help but admire her decision: “I will go.” This act of faith (“Whom having not seen you love ...” 1 Peter 1:8, nkjv) changed her life. She was changed from being a servant to being a bride, from the loneliness of the world to the joy of love and companionship, from her poverty into Isaac’s wealth. Did she see all of Isaac’s wealth? Of course not! That would be impossible! Did she know all about him? No. But what she saw and heard convinced her that she must go. Similarly, with lost sinners today, the Spirit speaks and shows them the things of Christ, sufficient for them to make a right decision. We left Isaac (as far as the record is concerned) on Mt. Moriah, for 22:19 mentions Abraham alone. Isaac is a picture of our Lord who went to Calvary to die for us, then returned to heaven to wait for His bride. In chapter 24, the servant (the Holy Spirit) went forth to seek the bride. Then, when the bride approached, Isaac appeared to receive her. What a scene, it may take place today! Just as it was “eventide” when they met, so it will be dark in this world when Christ returns for His bride.

Rebekah’s faith was rewarded. Her name was recorded in God’s Word; she shared Isaac’s love and wealth, and she became an important part of God’s plan. Had she refused to go, she would have died an unknown woman. “He who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17, nkjv).

Genesis 25–27

Isaac was the son of a famous father (Abraham), and the father of a famous son (Jacob), and sometimes people “lose” him as they study Genesis. While he lived longer than any of the other patriarchs, his life was less exciting. Unfortunately, he does not seem to be as strong in faith at the end of his life as he was at the beginning.

I. Isaac the Father (25)

A. *A distinguished home (vv. 1–11).*

Abraham’s marriage after the death of Sarah brought him six more sons and at least seven grandsons and three great-grandsons. However, note that these additional sons of Abraham do not have the status given to Isaac, for (like Christ) he is the heir of all things (Heb. 1:2). Abraham’s death shows what faith can do for a man. He died in peace (see 15:15); he died “full” (satisfied), and he died in faith (Heb. 11:13ff). This is the heritage Abraham left his son: his godly example (18:19), the tent and altar (see 26:25), and the wonderful promises of God (26:2–5). These spiritual blessings mean far more to a son than any material wealth.

B. *A disappointed home (vv. 12–23).*

The fulfillment of God’s covenant promise demanded that Isaac and Rebekah have a son, yet for the first twenty years of their married life, she was barren (vv. 20, 26). What a delight it is to see how this spiritually-minded husband and wife took their burden to the Lord. Surely they reminded God of His promises, and surely He was pleased with their prayers. The struggle of the unborn children perplexed Rebekah, so she asked God for wisdom (James 1:5). God told her that two nations were to be born and that, contrary to custom, the elder would serve the younger.

This is a clear evidence of God's sovereign election (Rom. 9:10–16). His choice was not based on the deeds of the boys, for they were unborn and had done neither good nor evil. As far as character is concerned, Esau was the more acceptable of the two—yet Jacob was the one chosen by God (Eph. 2:8–10).

C. A divided home (vv. 24–34).

The twin boys were opposite each other in appearance and temperament. The first boy was hairy and was named “Esau” (hairy); later his connection with the red pottage gave him the nickname “Edom” which means “red” (v. 30). Jacob's laying hold of Esau's heel (as though to catch him and trip him) gave him the name “Jacob”—the “heel-gripper” (supplanter, schemer, deceiver). Jacob was a quiet man who stayed at home; Esau was a man of the world, full of vigor and adventure. Alas, Esau had no spiritual appreciation. He would rather feed his body than enjoy the promises of God. Of course, Jacob's scheme to get the birthright showed that he doubted that God would fulfill His promise of 25:23. “Faith is living without scheming!” Esau despised his spiritual privileges as the firstborn (see Deut. 21:17 and 1 Chron. 5:1–2); he chose the flesh, not the Spirit. We never read of Esau having a tent or an altar, and 26:34–35 indicates that he loved worldly women. Hebrews 12:16 describes Esau as “profane” which means “of the world, common” (La., *profanus*—“outside the temple”). Like many people today, Esau was a success in the world and a failure with God.

II. Isaac the Pilgrim (26)

A. He faced his father's temptations (vv. 1–5).

Review 12:10ff. Isaac started toward Egypt, but God in His grace interrupted the trip and stopped him. Human nature does not improve from generation to generation. Isaac dwelt at Gerar which is on the borderline (10:19). Likewise, we have many “borderline Christians” today. Isaac had material blessings there, but not the spiritual blessings God gave him later when he left that place.

B. He repeated his father's sin (vv. 6–11).

See 12:10–20 and 20:1–5. This “half-lie,” that they were brother and sister, was adopted by Isaac and Rebekah, with the same sad results—loss of blessing, loss of testimony, and a public rebuke by the heathen king.

C. He dug again his father's wells (vv. 12–22).

Wells of water speak of the divine resources of God for the spiritual life (John 4:1–14). Abraham had dug these wells, but the enemy had either stolen them or stopped them up. How true this is today. The spiritual wells at which our fathers drank have been taken from us by the world. How we need to get back to the old wells (such as prayer, the Bible, the family altar, the church). Isaac not only opened them again, but he called them by the same names that Abraham had used (v. 18). Then he went on to dig some new wells to meet the needs of the day.

D. He trusted his father's God (vv. 23–35).

As long as he was away from Canaan, Isaac would have conflict, but when he went back to Beersheba (“the well of the oath”), God met him and gave him peace with the enemy (Prov. 16:7).

III. Isaac the Blessor (27)

Sad to say, this chapter depicts the whole family in a bad way spiritually. In 25:28 we saw the division of the home, and now we will see the sinful results of this carnal division.

A. *A declining father.*

Isaac was about 137 years old at this point, yet he acted as though he would die very soon. Actually, he lived to be 180 (35:28). His impatience to give Esau the blessing suggests that he was following his own carnal plans, not God's will. Had he forgotten the Word in 25:23, or was he trying to change God's plan? Note how he depended on his senses (feeling, eating, smelling). Note also that feeding the body took priority over doing God's will. Isaac at one time laid himself on the altar and was willing to die for the Lord. What a change!

B. *A doubting mother.*

Rebekah had been told by God that Jacob would receive God's blessing, yet she schemed and plotted to make sure that Esau was left out. Instead of going to God in prayer as she had years before, she depended on her own plans, a practice that would be characteristic of Jacob in later years. Rebekah paid dearly for her sin: she never saw her son again (see vv. 43–45). Esau deliberately acted to hurt her; and her bad example before Jacob cost him twenty years of trial.

C. *A deceiving son.*

Certainly Jacob knew God's promise for his life, yet he listened to his mother instead of to God. How the two of them hurried to finish the plot! "Whoever believes will not act hastily" (Isa. 28:16, nkjv). Rebekah must have been a good cook to be able to make goat's meat taste like venison. Jacob is a perfect picture of the hypocrite: his voice and his hands do not agree (what he says and what he does), and he deceives others. In v. 19 alone, Jacob tells his father three lies: "I am Esau" (he was Jacob); "I have done" (his mother did it all); "eat of my venison" (it was goat's meat). And his kiss in v. 27 was equally as deceitful. Did Jacob pay for this sin? Yes, many times. Laban deceived him about his wives and repeatedly changed his wages. In addition, Jacob's own sons would one day kill a kid (37:31) and put its blood on Joseph's coat to deceive their father. "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23).

D. *A despairing brother.*

Hebrews 12:17 indicates that Esau sought the blessing with tears, yet found no place for real repentance for his sins. Remorse, yes, but not sincere repentance. He was sorry for what he had lost, not sorry for what he had done. In v. 33, Isaac trembled when he realized that God had overruled his plans. Esau's tears could not change Isaac's mind or alter the blessing. Esau retaliated by plotting to murder his brother, and he deliberately hurt his parents by stirring up trouble with his marriage to heathen wives. The grace of God did not fail, but Esau failed the grace of God.

Sin in the home always brings heartache and misunderstanding. Had Isaac and Rebekah not "taken sides" with their two boys; had they continued to pray about matters as in their early married life; had they allowed God to have His way; then affairs would have been different. As it was, all of them suffered because of their unbelief and disobedience. We never get too old to be tempted—or to fail!

Genesis 28

I. The Venture (28:1–9)

We can accurately say that the rest of Genesis presents the life of Jacob, including his trials with Laban (28–31), with Esau (32–33), and with his sons (34ff). The story of Joseph is actually a part of Jacob's history.

The real reason Rebekah engineered Jacob's departure from home was to avoid the anger of Esau (27:41–46), but her excuse was that she wanted Jacob to find a godly wife (see 24:1–9). Esau's worldly wives were causing trouble in the home, as is always the case when God's people marry outside of God's will. Rebekah actually planned to send for Jacob when the time was right (27:45), but this plan failed. Jacob never did see his mother again. Once again, "faith is living without scheming." We all need to heed the warning of James 4:13–17.

It is wonderful when a son can leave home with his father's blessing! But Jacob could not depend on his father's faith. He had to meet God and make some decisions of his own. Unfortunately, it took more than twenty years for Jacob to come to a place of real surrender, and how dearly he paid for his unbelief and rebellion! Verses 6–9 illustrate the conflict of the flesh and the Spirit: Esau (the flesh) deliberately disobeyed the Lord and brought even greater sorrow into the home. Note that Jacob was not a young man when he started out on this venture. He was at least seventy-seven years old. Genesis 47:9 states that Jacob was 130 when he went to Egypt. Joseph was seventeen when he was sold into Egypt, and was thirty when he was presented to Pharaoh (41:46). Add, then, Joseph's thirteen years as a servant to the seven years of plenty and two years of famine, and you have Joseph at about thirty-nine years of age when Jacob came to Egypt. This means Joseph was born when Jacob was ninety-one, and Gen. 30:25 indicates that when Joseph was born Jacob had already fulfilled his fourteen years of service for his wives. This indicates that Jacob was about seventy-seven years old when he began to walk "on his own."

II. The Vision (28:10–12)

Jacob traveled about seventy miles from Beersheba to Bethel, a three-day journey. That night, he took "one of the stones" to rest against as he slept, and God gave him a vision of a ladder (or staircase, as some translate it) from heaven to earth. John 1:43–51 is the NT explanation of this verse. The ladder symbolizes Jesus Christ. Jacob is a perfect picture of the lost soul—in the darkness, fleeing for his life, away from the father's house, burdened with sin, and ignorant of the fact that God is near him and wants to save him. The ladder pictures Christ as the only way from earth to heaven. He opens heaven for us and brings heaven's blessings to our lives. And He alone can take us to heaven. Jacob thought he was in a lonely wilderness and awakened to discover he had been at the very gate of heaven! Relating this further to John 1:43–51, we note that Jacob was an Israelite who was full of guile (deceit), while v. 47 describes Nathanael as an Israelite without guile.

This is the first of at least seven recorded revelations from God to Jacob (see 31:3, 11–13; 32:1–2; 32:24–30; 35:1, 9–13; 46:1–4). The angels on the ladder were an indication of God's care. They appeared again to protect Jacob when he was about to face Esau (32:1–2).

III. The Voice (28:13–15)

Visions apart from the Word of God can be deceiving, so God spoke to Jacob to assure him. A person is not saved by angels or visions; he is saved by faith in God's Word. Note the promises that God gave to Jacob:

A. The land (v. 13).

This promise was first given to Abraham (13:14ff) and was reaffirmed to Isaac (26:1–5). The Holy Land belongs to the Jews, even though they do not possess all of it. One day, Israel will “possess her possessions” (Obadiah 17).

B. The multiplied seed (v. 14).

This assured Jacob that God would give him a wife; otherwise he could not have descendants (see also 13:16 and 22:17). Today, there are Jews at every point of the compass.

C. God's personal presence (v. 15).

This verse suggests that Jacob would wander about but God promised to be with him. Why? Because God had a plan for Jacob's life, and He would see to it that His plan was fulfilled (Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:28–29). Though in the hard years ahead Jacob had to reap the consequences of his sins, God was still with him to protect him and bless him.

IV. The Vow (28:16–22)

“This is the house of God!” exclaims Jacob, for the name “Bethel” means “house of God.” His experience that night not only changed him, but it changed the name of the place where he slept. To commemorate the event, Jacob set up a pillar and made it into an altar, pouring out a drink offering to the Lord. Years later, when he came back to Bethel, Jacob repeated this act of consecration (35:9–15).

This act of faith (even though caused by fear) was Jacob's way of dedicating himself to God. (See Phil. 2:17, where “offered” is literally “poured out.”) It is a wonderful thing that by faith a believer can turn a “pillow” into a “pillar”!

There are two interpretations suggested of Jacob's vow: (1) that he is bargaining with God by saying “If ... if ...”; (2) that he is showing faith in God, for the Hebrew word can be translated “Since ... since ...” This is actually the first vow recorded in the Bible. It is likely that both interpretations are true: Jacob believed God's Word, but there was still enough of the “old man” in him to try to bargain with God the way he bargained with Esau and Isaac. He was so accustomed to “scheming” that he tried to scheme his way into God's blessing! This was finally exposed and dealt with at Jabbok (Gen. 32). Jacob did return home in peace (Gen. 35:27–29), and he practiced tithing (v. 22). He realized that his dedication to God meant nothing unless his material goods were under His control as well. Abraham had practiced tithing (14:20), and in both cases the Law had not yet been given. Those who say that the tithe is not for this age of grace miss the fact that the early saints practiced tithing. It was their expression of faith and obedience to the Lord who guided them, guarded them, and provided for them.

Jacob did not always live up to this vow in the years that followed. He “met his match” in Laban, who was a schemer himself! For twenty years the two of them tried to outsmart each other, but, in the end, Jacob had been disciplined and God had kept his promises. It is good for us believers to have a “Bethel” in our lives, a place where we meet God in a serious way and make some definite commitments to Him. If we get away from the Lord, we can always come “back to Bethel” (Gen. 35:9–15) and renew our dedication. Jacob is an illustration of the conflict between the two natures, for he was always battling the flesh and trying to depend on his own abilities and plans. How good to know that God watches over His wayward children!

Genesis 29–31

From the spiritual mountaintop of Bethel (chap. 28), Jacob descended into everyday life at Haran, and here he “met his match” in scheming Laban, his uncle. Jacob spent about 20 years with Laban. During this time he reaped the sad consequences of his own sins, but, at the same time, God was disciplining him and preparing him for future service.

I. Jacob's Service for Laban's Daughters (29:1–30:24)

A. Decision (29:1–20).

God providentially directs Jacob to the house of Laban, but note that Jacob did not pause to pray, as did Abraham's servant when he was on his important errand (24:12). Jacob encouraged the other shepherds to go back to the pastures (v. 7) because he wanted to greet Rachel in private. He was still the schemer. Note how Rachel and Laban ran when they discovered who Jacob was (vv. 12–13). Jacob made his decision: he wanted beautiful Rachel for his wife. Rachel means “ewe,” while Leah means “wild cow.” Leah's eyes lacked that deep sparkle that, in Middle Eastern cultures, is a mark of beauty. Jacob agreed to serve Laban for seven years, and as always, where there is love, the time and labor passed quickly. Note that in v. 15 we have the first “installment” of Jacob's discipline: he became a servant. In 25:23, it had been promised that “the elder shall serve the younger”; but now the younger was a servant himself.

B. Deception (29:21–30).

Here is discipline “installment” number two—the deceiver himself is deceived. Laban was not about to forfeit his elder daughter's chances for marriage, so he forced Jacob to marry her. Jacob had lied about the firstborn (27:19); now he is lied to about the firstborn (29:26). “The way of transgressors is hard” (Prov. 13:15). He fulfilled the week of marriage celebration for Leah, then married Rachel and began his second term of service for another seven years. Laban was careful that all the men of the area witnessed the marriage to Leah (v. 22). Having consummated the marriage, Jacob could not back out. No doubt he realized that God was disciplining him for his own scheming.

C. Division (29:31–30:24).

When a marriage begins with sin, there is usually division and unhappiness in the home. At first, neither of the two wives bore children, but it was obvious that Jacob loved Rachel more and that he “slighted” (hated, v. 31) Leah. So, God honored Leah by giving her four sons: Reuben (“Look, a son!”), Simeon (“hearing”), Levi (“joined”), and Judah (“praise”). This was in answer to Leah's prayers (see 29:33 and 30:6, 17, 22). Rachel could not help but envy her sister, and her envy created anger and disagreement between her and Jacob. Instead of losing his temper, Jacob should have prayed about the problem, as his parents had done years before (25:19–23). The man-made solution was that Jacob marry Bilhah, who bore him Dan (“judgment”), and Naphtali (“wrestling”). Leah followed by giving him Zilpah, and she bore Gad (“a troop”) and Asher (“good fortune”). It is obvious that Jacob did not have a spiritual home: his wives disagreed and used him as a pawn in their plans (30:14–16). Rachel even had an interest in idols (31:19). We read of no altar in his house, and the sad results are not difficult to see. Leah bore two more sons: Issachar (“reward, hire”) and Zebulun (“dwelling”); and Rachel bore Jacob's beloved Joseph (“may He add”). Later she would bear Benjamin (“son of my right hand”) and then die (35:16–20). Jacob also had several daughters (30:21; 37:35; 46:7, 15).

This account covers fourteen years in Jacob's life—years of toil, trial, and testing. God used Laban and the difficult circumstances of life to discipline Jacob and prepare him for the tasks that lay ahead.

II. Jacob's Scheme for Laban's Cattle (30:25–43)

Jacob had served for fourteen years, and he realized that he must strike out on his own and provide for his large family. He asked Laban to send him away; however, the crafty Syrian was not about to lose so valuable a son-in-law. Jacob had worked fourteen years for his two wives; now he could work for the cattle he would need in order to get established on his own. Of course, Laban covered the evil motive of his plan by using the Lord's name (v. 27) and by asking Jacob to choose the terms. "Name me your wages, and I will give it." Laban asked, but Jacob refused a gift, for the last time he accepted Laban's "gift" he was deceived (29:19). Jacob offered to work as Laban's shepherd, if Laban would give him the "rejects" of the flocks and herds. Oriental sheep are white and goats brown or black. By accepting the striped, spotted, and speckled animals, Jacob was apparently giving Laban the better deal. It was certainly an act of faith on Jacob's part.

But the schemer went to work. Instead of trusting God to meet the need (see 31:9, and 28:15, 20), Jacob used his own plan. The special rods and sticks at the troughs probably did not influence the sheep; it was God who determined what kind of sheep and goats would be conceived. However, Jacob did use "selective breeding" (vv. 40–43) so that only the stronger cattle conceived. We learn from 31:7–8 that Laban changed the terms of the contract several times as he saw Jacob's flocks increasing, but God overruled Laban and made Jacob a wealthy man.

III. Jacob's Flight from Laban's House (31)

A. *The conference (vv. 1–16).*

Three factors entered into Jacob's decision to leave: the changed attitude of Laban; the need for establishing his own home; and, most of all, the direct leading of the Lord. God had reminded Jacob of his Bethel vow. The backslider now had to return and fulfill his promises to the Lord who had blessed him. Rachel and Leah agreed to go, but their decision was based on material considerations, not the will of the Lord. We wonder if the wives knew anything about Jacob's Bethel experience until now.

B. *The chase (vv. 17–35).*

Instead of trusting God to protect him, Jacob steals away in haste while Laban was away shearing sheep. What a poor testimony when believers choose to act in secrecy. Laban was already three days' journey from Jacob (30:36), so he did not catch up with him for a week. God warned Laban before he even faced Jacob, so there was no reason for Jacob's fear (v. 31; see also Prov. 16:7). Laban "put on a front" and made it look as though he was offended, when he was probably glad to be rid of the man who was outsmarting him and getting richer. His real concern comes out in v. 30—someone had stolen his idols! Hidden sin led to more sin as Rachel, the thief, lied to her father and her husband, while angry Laban examined everything in the caravan.

C. *The conflict (vv. 36–42).*

Twenty years' pent-up anger now revealed itself, and Jacob "laid it on the line" to his father-in-law. Laban was an idolater, and Jacob a backslider—how could there be any agreement between them? The only redeeming thing in Jacob's angry speech is that he gave God the glory for his success (v. 42).

D. The covenant (vv. 43–55).

The so-called “Mizpah Blessing” found in many hymnals is not at all scriptural. These two men did not trust each other, so they set up a pillar to remind both of them that God was watching. Instead of witnessing to their friendship (as the “Mizpah Blessing” states), these stones witnessed to their mutual distrust of one another. Note that in v. 47, the two men did not even speak the same language! (Both names mean “heap of witness” or “heap of testimony.”) It is truly sad when family members cannot trust each other. How much better it would have been had they forgiven each other and turned the whole thing over to God. Verse 52 indicates that the pillar Laban erected was also a boundary marker beyond which Jacob dare not go.

Jacob's twenty years of servitude were over, but he needed still to go back to Bethel and make things right with God.

Genesis 32–36

These chapters record several crucial experiences in Jacob's life as he made his way from Laban's house to Bethel. They give us three vivid pictures of this man who illustrates for us the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, the old life and the new.

I. Jacob the Wrestler (32)

Esau was coming and Jacob was about to meet up with his forgotten past. Would Esau forgive him or fight him? Would Jacob lose everything he had schemed to acquire? How tragic it is when the past catches up with sinners. Geography could not erase Jacob's past nor could twenty years of history change it. But before Jacob met Esau, he experienced three other meetings:

A. He met God's angels (vv. 1–20).

He had first seen these angels at Bethel (chap. 28), and they should have been a reminder to Jacob that God was in control. He named the place “the two camps” (his own camp and the camp or army of angels), but he failed to put his faith in God who had promised years before to protect him. Believers today may claim Heb. 1:14 and Ps. 91:11–13 as they are walking in the will of God. Alas, Jacob started trusting himself and his own schemes again! He tried to appease Esau with gifts. He divided his company into two bands (v. 7) and ignored the protecting army of angels. Then, after taking these steps in carnal confidence, he asked for God's help! Had he forgotten the way God had protected him from Laban? (31:24)

B. He met the Lord (vv. 21–26).

It is when we get alone with God that good things begin to happen. Christ came to wrestle with Jacob, and the struggle lasted all night. Keep in mind that Jacob was not wrestling to get a blessing from God; rather, he was defending himself and refusing to yield. The Lord wanted to break Jacob and bring him to the place where he would honestly say, “Not I, but Christ” (Gal. 2:20). All night long, Jacob defended himself and refused to surrender or even admit that he had sinned. Then God weakened Jacob, and the wrestler could only cling! Now instead of scheming for a blessing or bargaining for a blessing, he asked God for the blessing—and he received it.

C. He met himself (vv. 27–32).

We don't truly see ourselves until first we see the Lord. "What is your name?" (v. 27, nkjv) was the question that forced Jacob to confess his true self—"Jacob, the schemer." Once he faced himself and confessed his sin, Jacob could be changed. God gave him a new name—"Israel, prince with God" or "a God-governed man." The way to have power with God is to be broken by God. God also gave him a new beginning and a new power as he began "walking in the Spirit" and not in the flesh. This was illustrated by a new walk, for now Jacob limped. He had been broken by God, but his limp was a mark of power and not weakness. Verse 31 indicates the dawning of a new day, as the sun rose and Jacob limped out to meet Esau-with God's help!

II. Jacob the Backslider (33–34)

It would have been wonderful had Jacob lived up to his new name and new position with God, but he did not. The chapter begins with "Jacob" the old name, not "Israel" the new name, and we see him "lifting up his eyes"—walking by sight, not by faith. See what Jacob lost because he did not claim his spiritual privileges:

A. *His limp (33:3).*

He bowed before Esau instead of walking (limping) and faced him man-to-man. It is always tragic when a "prince with God" cringes before a man of the world! Better to limp by faith than to bow in self-trust.

B. *His power (33:1–2, 8–11).*

See Jacob scheming again, bargaining with the enemy. Did God not assure him of His power? Had God not promised to see him through?

C. *His testimony (33:12–17).*

Jacob lied to Esau about the flocks and traveled in the opposite direction. The two never did meet until they buried their father (35:29). No doubt, at that meeting, Esau asked Jacob what had happened to him after they parted.

D. *His tent (33:17).*

Jacob built a house and settled down in Succoth.

E. *His vision (33:19).*

He moved again and pitched his tent toward the city of Shechem, not unlike Lot (13:12). He lost the vision of God's city (Heb. 11:13–16).

F. *His daughter (34).*

Like Lot, Jacob put his family in a place of temptation, and, when his daughter investigated the city, she was violated. Sad to say, Jacob's sons were liars like their father. In fact, they used the sacred rite of circumcision to accomplish their wicked scheme. Verses 30–31 suggest that Jacob was selfishly more concerned with his own safety and welfare than he was with the sins of his family.

When did all of this begin? When Jacob failed to live up to his new standing with God. Why do NT Christians today scheme and sin and fail? Because they fail to live up to their heavenly position in Christ (Eph. 4:1ff).

III. Jacob the Traveler (35–36)

Note how often Jacob “journeyed” in these chapters (35:5, 16, 21). God had called him to go “back to Bethel” (v. 1), back to the place of the vision and the vow. When a person is backslidden (as Jacob was), there is nothing else for him to do but go back to the place of dedication and renew his vows. Before he could take his company back to the altar, however, Jacob had to “clean house”—the strange gods and the jewelry associated with heathen worship had to be buried. The only place for sin is in the grave. In fact, there are four graves in this chapter: the grave of the idols (v. 4), Deborah’s grave (v. 8), Rachel’s grave (v. 19), and Isaac’s grave (v. 29).

Jacob returned to Bethel and built an altar. God met him in a new way and reminded him of his new name, Israel. God reaffirmed the promises He gave to Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob responded by erecting a new pillar and anointing it as he had done years before. A backslidden believer does not need a new experience to get right with God. He needs only to reaffirm the old experience in a new way.

How strange that Rachel should die soon after Jacob is restored to fellowship with God. Great spiritual experiences are not security against the sorrows and trials of life. And certainly Jacob was better able to bear this sorrow now that he had again built his altar. Everything that Jacob had lost before had been regained because he had met God at the altar.

Not only are there sorrows in the family of the dedicated believer, but there are also sins (v. 22). Reuben was born amid great expectations (29:32), and Jacob said in later years that Reuben could have accomplished much (49:3). But Reuben was unstable; he lacked godly character (49:4); and, as a consequence, he lost the birthright that belonged to the firstborn son (1 Chron. 5:1–2) and had to give it to Judah and Joseph. Sin never brings blessing; it is always costly. The final act on this journey was for Jacob and Esau to bury their father. Jacob had planned to see his mother again, but she died before he arrived home. Chapter 36 gives the history of Esau, for God did make him a mighty nation. Unfortunately, the Edomites were the enemies of God’s people for centuries.

Genesis 37–40

We begin now a study of one of the most exciting biographies in the Bible, that of Joseph and his brothers. The entire story illustrates the sovereignty of God and God’s providential care of His own. While Joseph had his faults, he still stands out as a spiritual giant in his own family.

I. Joseph the Favored Son (37)

A. *Jacob’s love (vv. 1–4).*

Since Rachel was Jacob’s favorite wife, and Joseph was her firstborn son (30:22–24), it is easy to see why Jacob favored him in his old age. This kind of partiality in a home is bound to cause trouble. Joseph at seventeen was helping with the sheep, but soon Jacob relieved him of that duty and made him an “overseer” by giving him a “tailored coat.” Jacob wanted to make Joseph a ruler before he had really learned how to be a servant! The result—Joseph’s brothers hated him (v. 4) and envied him (v. 11).

B. *Joseph’s dreams (vv. 5–11).*

That these dreams came from God, there is no question; and certainly the assurance that one day he would rule helped to keep Joseph faithful during those many years of testing in Egypt. Note that the first dream had an earthly setting, while the second dream was set in heaven. This suggests

Abraham's earthly children (the Jews) and his heavenly seed (the church). Joseph's brothers did one day bow down to him! See also 42:6; 43:26; and 44:14.

C. Judah's scheme (vv. 12–28).

We are not told which of the brothers first suggested doing away with Joseph. Possibly it was Simeon, who resented Joseph's intrusion on the rights of the firstborn (which would finally be taken away from Reuben, 49:3–4). We know from chapter 34 that Simeon was crafty and cruel, and in 42:24, Joseph was rather harsh on Simeon. At any rate, the brothers were back in the region of Shechem (where they had gotten into trouble before, chap. 34), and they plotted to slay Joseph. It is to Reuben's credit that he tried to spare Joseph's life, although he used the wrong method to accomplish a noble deed. God overruled the hatred of the men, and Joseph was sold into slavery instead of slain in cold blood.

D. Jacob's sorrow (vv. 29–36).

Years before, Jacob had slain a kid to deceive his father (27:9ff), and now his sons deceived him the same way. We reap what we sow. Jacob spent the next twenty-two years in sorrow, thinking that Joseph was dead. He thought that everything was working against him (Gen. 42:36), when in reality everything was working for him (Rom. 8:28). God had sent Joseph ahead to prepare the way for Israel's preservation as a nation.

II. Joseph the Faithful Steward (38–39)

Chapter 38 presents a sordid picture, showing Judah yielding to the lusts of the flesh. It is quite a contrast to Joseph's purity (39:7–13). Judah was willing to sell his brother for a slave, yet he himself was a "slave of sin" (John 8:34). Even so, "where sin abounds, grace much more abounds" (Rom. 5:20), for we see that Tamar is included in the human lineage of Christ (Matt. 1:3). Note that Judah was harder on others than on himself (v. 24). Like David, he wanted the "sinner" judged—until he discovered that he was the sinner!

Jacob had tried to shield Joseph from the responsibilities of work, but God knew that Joseph could never be a ruler until first he was a servant (Matt. 25:21). God used three disciplines in Joseph's life to prepare him to be the second ruler of Egypt:

A. The discipline of service (39:1–6).

Joseph exchanged his "tailored coat" for a servant's garb, and God forced him to learn how to work. This way, he learned humility (1 Peter 5:5–6) and the importance of obeying orders.

Because Joseph was faithful in the small things, God promoted him to greater things. See Prov. 22:29 and 12:24.

B. The discipline of self-control (39:7–18).

Joseph's mother was a beautiful woman, and no doubt the son inherited her features (29:17). Egyptian women were known for their unfaithfulness, but Joseph did not yield. God was testing Joseph, for if Joseph could not control himself as a servant, he could never control others as a ruler. He could have argued, "Nobody will know!" or "Everybody else is doing it!" But, instead, he lived to please God and made it a point to make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). "Flee youthful lusts!" Paul admonished (2 Tim. 2:22)—and that is just what Joseph did. As the Puritan preacher said, Joseph lost his coat, but he kept his character. Too many people have failed in this discipline, and God has had to put them on the shelf (1 Cor. 9:24–27; Prov. 16:32; 25:28).

C. *The discipline of suffering (39:19–23).*

Not only was Joseph able to control his appetites, but he was also able to control his tongue; for he did not argue with the officers or expose the lie Potiphar's wife was spreading about him. Control of the tongue is a mark of spiritual maturity (James 3). It is likely that Potiphar was the captain of the guards in charge of prisoners; he may even have been the chief executioner. At any rate, he saw to it that Joseph was put in the king's prison (v. 20), and Joseph's faithfulness and devotion again brought him favor with the officers. "The Lord was with Joseph" is the key to his success (39:2, 5, 21). Joseph had to suffer as a prisoner for at least two years, and probably longer. Psalm 105:17–20 explains that this suffering put "iron" in his soul. It helped to make a man out of him. People who avoid suffering have a hard time developing character. Certainly Joseph learned patience from his suffering (James 1:1–5) as well as a deeper faith in God's Word (Heb. 6:12). This suffering was not enjoyable, but it was necessary, and one day it turned into glory.

III. **Joseph the Forgotten Servant (40)**

Joseph was now a servant in the royal prison (41:12), faithfully doing his work and waiting for the day when his prophetic dreams would come true. One day two new prisoners were added—the cupbearer to Pharaoh and the chief baker. What their crimes were is not stated; it may have been some minor thing that upset Pharaoh. However, we know that God arranged their arrest for Joseph's sake. Joseph had been treated unjustly, but he knew that one day God would fulfill His Word.

Note Joseph's humility as he interpreted the two dreams (v. 8). He gave all the glory to the Lord. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

The two prisoners were in bonds because of something they had done, while Joseph was innocent. His interpretation of the dreams came true: the cupbearer was restored, and the baker was hanged. Yet Joseph was left in prison! We may wonder why others experience the blessings that we so desperately need; yet God has His plan and His time.

There is a hint of discouragement and unbelief, however, in Joseph's request in v. 14. Was Joseph leaning on the arm of flesh? If so, the arm of flesh failed him, for the butler completely forgot about Joseph for the next two years. This was a good lesson to Joseph never to trust in men. God was ultimately going to use the butler's bad memory to deliver Joseph, but the right time had not yet come. The butler forgot Joseph, but God did not forget him!

Joseph was seventeen years old when he went to Egypt and thirty years old when he was delivered from the prison (41:46). This means he spent thirteen years as a servant and a prisoner, years of discipline and training, and years of preparation for his lifelong ministry as the second ruler of Egypt. God prepares us for what He is preparing for us, if we will but yield to Him.

In many ways, Joseph is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ, even though nowhere in the NT is he specifically called a type of Christ. Joseph was a beloved son who was hated and rejected by His own brothers. They sold him for a slave and then one day met him as their king. Joseph had to suffer before he could enter into his glory. He was victorious over temptation and yet arrested and treated unjustly. Joseph was a faithful servant who ministered to others. Eventually he was exalted to the throne and was responsible for saving the nations. His brothers did not recognize him the first time, but he revealed himself to them the second time they came to Egypt. So it will be with Israel: they did not know Christ when He came the first time, but they will see Him when He comes again and will bow before Him.

Genesis 41–45

This section records Joseph's elevation from prisoner to second ruler of the land. He was given a new name—"the revealer of secrets" (41:45). Note the three secrets that Joseph revealed.

I. The Secret of Pharaoh's Dreams (41)

Joseph had hoped that the butler would remember him and intercede for him (40:13–15), but the man did not remember Joseph until the day Pharaoh became disturbed because he could not find the meaning of his strange dreams. God's ways are past finding out, but God's time to act is never too early or too late. Note the humility of Joseph as he stood before the mightiest monarch on earth: "God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace" (v. 16). He explained the dream: there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Then he gave wise counsel: appoint a wise man to administer the food supply. God directed Pharaoh to appoint Joseph, so now he was exalted to the throne! See also 1 Peter 5:6.

Joseph's marriage to a Gentile bride is a type of Christ's marriage to the church during this age when His brothers after the flesh have rejected Him. "Manasseh" means "to forget" and suggests that Joseph's new position in God's will had caused him to forget the trials of the past; and "Ephraim" means "doubly fruitful," suggesting that all his trials had, in the end, led to fruitfulness and blessing. Like the grain of wheat, Joseph "died" that he might not abide alone (John 12:23–26). God kept His Word to Joseph, and Joseph's predictions came true. The Word of the Lord stands when man's wisdom fails (41:8).

However, all of this was but a part of a greater plan, a plan to preserve Israel and prepare the way for the birth of Christ.

II. The Secrets of His Brothers' Hearts (42–44)

The plan was now set in motion, for Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt and sent his sons to secure food. Consider their two visits to Egypt.

A. *The first visit (v. 42).*

Ten of the sons went down to Egypt, and Joseph recognized them even though they did not recognize him. Certainly his appearance had changed in twenty years, and his Egyptian speech and dress would lead them to believe he was a native. Note that the ten men bowed down (42:6), but that Joseph's dreams had predicted that eleven would bow (37:9–10). This explains how Joseph knew the men would return with his brother, Benjamin.

Why was Joseph so hard on his brothers? And why did he wait so long to reveal himself to them? Because he wanted to be sure they had repented of their sins. To excuse people who are not sincerely repentant is to make them a worse sinner (see Luke 17:3–4). How did Joseph deal with his brothers? He spoke roughly to them and accused them of being spies (7–14); he kept them locked up for three days (v. 17); and then he kept Simeon as hostage and bound him before their eyes (vv. 18–24). His crowning act was to give them back their money (vv. 25–28). This rough treatment had its designed result, for the men confessed, "We are guilty!" See vv. 21–23. This statement indicated to Joseph that their hearts were softening. Their report to Jacob back home and their discovery of the money in their sacks only complicated their problem. What would they do? If they stayed home, they were thieves, but if they went back to Egypt, they had to risk taking Benjamin with them. We wonder if v. 36 indicates that Jacob knew what they had done to Joseph years before.

B. The second visit (chaps. 43–44).

God made Jacob's family hungry again, and like the prodigal son of Luke 15, these men had to go back or starve to death. We see here other indications of their change of heart: Judah's willingness to be surety, to bear the blame for young Benjamin; their willingness to return the money; and their confession of the truth to Joseph's steward (43:19–22). However, they were making some mistakes too—taking a present to Joseph and confessing their sins to the servant instead of to Joseph himself. We cannot help but see in this whole episode the way God deals with the lost sinner. God controls circumstances to bring the sinner to himself and to the end of himself. But, sad to say, too many convicted sinners try to win their salvation by offering a present, or by confessing to a human servant, or by making some great sacrifice (as Judah did when he offered his own life as surety for Benjamin). The only way Joseph could excuse their sins was by receiving their honest confession and repentance.

Joseph used two devices to bring them to the place of confession: the feast of joy (43:26–34—note that in v. 26 and v. 28 all eleven men bowed before him) and the discovery of the cup in Benjamin's sack. Again in 44:14 all eleven men fell down before Joseph in true contrition. "God has found out the iniquity of your servants!" they confess (44:16, nkjv). We cannot help but admire Judah's speech in 44:18–34, not only for its humility and confession but also for the love that it shows toward his father and his youngest brother. He was willing to be surety, to bear the blame, even though it would cost him his life.

What a beautiful spiritual lesson we have here. Judah thought that Joseph was actually dead (44:20), and therefore, that he himself was guilty of murder. What he did not realize was that Joseph was alive—and was his savior! The lost sinner stands before God's bar of judgment and confesses his guilt, thinking that his confession will mean certain wrath. But Jesus Christ is alive, and because He is alive, He is able to save to the uttermost. Christ does not expect us to be surety for our sins, or for the sins of another, for He Himself is our surety before God (Heb. 7:22). As long as Christ lives, God can never condemn us. And He will live forever!

It was not their confession of guilt, their sacrifices, or their gifts that brought salvation to the brothers. It was the gracious forgiveness of Joseph, a forgiveness purchased by his own suffering on their behalf. What a picture of Jesus Christ!

III. The Secret of God's Purpose (45)

It was now time for Joseph to reveal himself and the purpose for which God had sent him. Acts 7:13 makes it clear that it was "the second time" that he revealed himself, just as it was the second time that Israel received Moses after rejecting his leadership forty years before (Acts 7:35). This is the theme of Stephen's speech recorded in Acts 7: the chosen people Israel have always rejected their saviors the first time and received them the second time; they will do the same with Jesus Christ.

Joseph's revelation of himself brought his brothers terror, for they fully expected him to judge them for their past sins. But he had seen their repentance; they had bowed before him; and he knew he could forgive them. He explained that five more years of famine would follow, but that he had prepared a place of refuge for them and their families there in Egypt. God had sent him before to save their lives.

Joseph promised to nourish them (v. 11) and protect them. He wept over them and kissed them, and he sent gifts to his father to assure him of the riches that lay in Egypt. "Come unto me!" was his invitation (45:18). Then, what a change took place in Jacob after he discovered that Joseph was alive—a change not too different from the change in the disciples when they discovered that Christ was alive! Before, Jacob had said, "All these things are against me (42:36), but now he could say, "All things are working together for good!"

Genesis 46–50

These chapters cover the last days of Jacob. We see him performing several acts for the last time. It's a sobering reminder that one day each of us will face the end.

I. Jacob's Last Journey (46–47)

By faith, Jacob left Hebron and started for Egypt, and God honored his faith by revealing Himself again and renewing His promises (46:2–4). Jacob no doubt remembered that Abraham had sinned in going to Egypt (12:10ff), and that Isaac had been forbidden to go there (26:2), so he was reassured by God's Word. Instead of being a place of defeat, Egypt would be a place of blessing, for the nation would increase in spite of suffering. The whole family went with Jacob: the thirty-three descendants of Leah (vv. 8–15); the sixteen descendants of Zilpah (vv. 16–18); the fourteen descendants of Rachel (vv. 19–22); and the seven descendants of Bilhah (vv. 23–25). Actually sixty-six traveled with Jacob, and when we add Jacob and Joseph and his two sons (v. 27), we get a total of seventy. See Ex. 1:5. Acts 7:14 says that there were seventy-five in the family, but this may include the five children of Ephraim and Manasseh, listed in 1 Chron. 7:14ff. Note that Judah was now the trusted one, for Jacob sent him ahead as the leader. Meanwhile, Joseph was preparing the way with Pharaoh, finding them places to live and occupations to follow while in the land. Since Egypt is a picture of this present world system, it does not surprise us that shepherds were an abomination to the unsaved people. Our Lord is the Good Shepherd, and the world will have nothing to do with Him!

Jacob met Pharaoh, testified of God's goodness during his long life, and then blessed him. The only blessing this world has comes from God through God's people Israel (John 4:22).

Verses 13ff describe the way Joseph managed the affairs of Egypt giving us an illustration of dedication: the people gave him their money, their lands, their possessions, and their own bodies (Rom. 12:1–2). We should give our all to Christ who has saved us and who cares for us daily.

II. Jacob's Last Blessing (48)

Jacob spent the last 17 of his 147 years with Joseph in Egypt, so he had his favorite son the first 17 years of Joseph's life and then the last 17 years of his own life. Knowing that he was to die, the aged patriarch called Joseph to his bed (47:31) that he might bless his two sons. See Heb. 11:21. The two boys were at least in their early 20s (see 41:50 and 47:28). Jacob claimed the boys as his own, comparing them in status with his firstborn, Reuben and Simeon. (We will see in 49:5–7 that Simeon and Levi would disappear as separate tribes, so that Ephraim and Manasseh would take their places.) Knowing that Manasseh was the firstborn, Joseph put the boy at Jacob's right, with Ephraim on the left, but Jacob crossed his arms and gave the blessing of the firstborn to Ephraim. This displeased Joseph, but Jacob was guided by God, for God was going to give the greater blessing to Ephraim. This is another example of the divine principle of setting aside the first to establish the second (Heb. 10:9). We saw this before in Seth and Cain, Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau. The fact that Jacob crossed his hands brings the cross into the picture. It is through the cross that God crucified the old nature and now sets aside the natural that He might establish the spiritual. When you are born again, God rearranges your spiritual "birth order."

Jacob also blessed Joseph in the name of the God who had "shepherded" him all his years, and he gave to Joseph a special parcel of land (v. 22, and see John 4:5). This was a token of the total inheritance they were yet to receive.

III. Jacob's Last Message (49)

This is a difficult chapter and we cannot go into all the details. In this final message to his sons, Jacob revealed their character and predicted their history. Reuben was the firstborn and should have inherited might and glory, but because of his sin, he lost the blessings of his birth (Gen. 35:22, 1 Chron. 5:1–2). Simeon and Levi both were sons of Leah, and both were cruel and self-willed as seen in their crime of murdering the men of Shechem (Gen. 34). Simeon's descendants were later absorbed into the tribe of Judah (Josh. 19:1), and Levi became the priestly tribe (what grace!) having no inheritance of their own. Simeon's numerical decline is seen when we compare Num. 1:23 (59,300) with Num. 26:14 (22,200).

Judah is identified with the lion, the kingly beast; for out of Judah, the lawgiver (Christ) would come, as would all the rightful kings of Israel. Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5). Verse 10 predicts that Shiloh ("The Rest-Giver" Christ) would not come until Judah had lost his rule, and certainly this was true when Jesus was born. Verses 11–12 promise great material blessings to Judah. Zebulun would stretch from the Sea of Galilee to the Mediterranean Sea, thus its connection with ships. Issachar is pictured as a humble servant to others, willing to bear their burdens that they might enjoy rest, rather than resisting and having liberty. Dan is connected with the serpent and deceit. It is no surprise that idolatry in Israel started with Dan. Gad means "a troop" (30:11) and is connected with war; Asher is connected with riches, especially the kind that would please a king. Naphtali is compared to a beautiful deer let loose, and it is promised that he will know how to use powerful language; see the victory and the song of Barak and Deborah in Jud. 4–5 (note 4:6).

The blessing on Joseph is longest. He is a fruitful bough, attacked by his brothers, but victorious in the end. Jacob gives Joseph a variety of blessings, material and spiritual, and he assures Joseph of ultimate victory through the God of Israel. Joseph is a "prince among his brethren" (end of v. 26). Benjamin is compared to a wolf catching the game he pursues and then enjoying his prey at night. King Saul came from this tribe and was a conqueror; Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the apostle, also came from Benjamin.

It is difficult to press all the details of this amazing prophecy. History has shown that Jacob's words came true. Certainly there is a lesson here of personal responsibility, for some of the tribes lost their blessings because of the sins of their founders. Joseph suffered the most during his early life, yet he received the greatest blessings.

IV. Jacob's Last Request (50)

In 49:29–33, the aged man had asked to be buried with his family in the cave of Machpelah. Already Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were there, and Jacob's body would be the seventh. When Jacob died, his sons mourned for him and gave him an honorable burial. Apparently the entire land mourned for him for seventy days, and during forty of these days, the embalmers were preparing his body. This is the first case of an embalmed body and an elaborate funeral in the Bible. Why did Jacob (and Joseph after him, 50:24–26) want to be buried in Canaan? This was the land God had given him; he did not belong to the world (Egypt). Perhaps we have a spiritual lesson here as well: not only does the believer's spirit go to heaven when he or she dies, but the body will also be taken from this world at the resurrection.

It is unfortunate that Joseph's brothers did not believe his words when he told them years before that he had forgiven them! In fact, their unbelief and fear caused him to weep. They illustrate weak Christians today who cannot accept God's Word, and, as a consequence, live in fear and doubt. "Fear not!" is Christ's Word to us just as it was Joseph's word to his brothers. In their blindness, they wanted to work for his forgiveness ("We are your servants," v. 18, nkjv), but he gave them full pardon through grace.

Genesis begins with a garden and ends with a coffin. What a commentary on the results of sin in this world! But the Bible ends with a description of a beautiful "garden city" (Rev. 21–22), the home of all who put their trust in Jesus Christ.