

# LESSONS FROM GENESIS

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assembly Bible studies, some from home life, and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "The Believer's Bible Commentary," by William MacDonald
- "Genesis in the light of the New Testament," by F.W. Grant
- "The Gospel in Genesis," by Henry Law
- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan

## **GENESIS.**

The Message: The failure of man under every condition, is met by the salvation of God.

Keyword: "Beginning."

Key verse: 1:1

There are 60 quotations from Genesis in the New Testament.

## **GENESIS 1**

### **PRIMEVAL HISTORY (2000 years)**

#### **1. The Beginning of the Universe, 1:1-25**

Two worldviews exist creation with a Creator or without a Creator. The conflict is not with true science but with these two worldviews. How things have come to be, cannot be dogmatically proven so, without taking a cut-and-dried position about the process of creation, I take a cut-and-dried position about the origin of creation. God created everything. The universe is not a product of blind chance, but a carefully planned and orderly development of things that reveals the character and personality of God, the Creator. The visible evidence along with the references to things that we know from scripture that happened before the foundation of the world, unfold to us a very purposeful design that has ultimately a beautiful fellowship between the Creator and the created beings He made in His image to be like Him. We are here. Heavens and earth are here. How exactly it came to pass isn't really all that important. The fact is that things are the way they are, we are the way we are, and God is the way He is. This is all that we really need to know to have significance.

We know God is creative. We know God is distinct from His creation. We know God is eternal and in control of the world. We know we are valuable in God's eyes because He created us. We know we are more important than animals because we have been made in God's image. We know our personhood is not divine but is a reflection of God's glory. We know that God intends us to reflect His character, "Be ye holy for I am holy." We know our worth isn't in the physical part of our being, but in the ability, God has given us to respond to Him. We know God has ultimate authority over everything but has given us responsibilities to be in charge of those things for which He has qualified us to accomplish.

When God said, "Let there be Light!" darkness heard and vanished. Before that time, the world was a mass of unarranged material without form or beauty. Impenetrable night covered this lifeless ball. It was out of this that God produced form, changing disorder into order and shaping this world and the little we know of the universe, into something of beauty. Rather than changing it in one instant, to full-blown perfection, God revealed Himself in what He did during the six days of creation. He still does that today. God works. He follows a process so

that we can learn wisdom and the value of the effort that fills a personality with satisfaction. Patient diligence leads to well-doing.

The first steps we take, are to make the light of understanding into something that reveals character, purpose, harmony, and grace that delights the soul when it is beneficial to others. God's plan was to bring His Light into the physical darkness that encompassed the earth, and His spiritual Light into our moral darkness. "The Light of the world," said that if we follow Him, we will not walk in the darkness of pessimism and uncertainty, but we would have the "Light of Life." That understanding cannot be mixed with darkness, or else all we would have would be a dim twilight. Light in its nature is pure and bright, like sunlight on new snow. Man's hands pollute it and cannot make it come back to its purity and inherent loveliness.

That pure Light is free, nor can it be purchased or added to. It is a precious treasure that we enjoy physically on a bright summer day, and morally when we are cleansed from sin and its defilement of our soul and spirit. When we become sick of sin, Light is there as a free gift from Him who is the Light. It is with a glad heart; our Lord gives from His grace treasure-house. He loves us because He wants to love us. He calls us because He wants to call us. He blesses us because He wants to bless us. He saves us because He wants to save us. He shines light into our souls because He wants us to have light in our souls. But He has given us the free will to accept by faith what He offers as a gift or to reject all He offers.

A person can live in darkness if that person chooses to. He or she can reject the light of understanding that comes with faith if they so choose. Everything we take into our minds comes from faith in something or someone. A person can reject the Light of Life if that is what they really want to do, which will mean they live in darkness by their own choice. That also means they will live in the blackness of darkness forever.

**A UNIFIED ORGANISM.** *Psalm 139:14. "I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knows right well."*

Of all God created, humans are the most wonderful of all because we are spirit, soul, and body. I am a soul. My body is a substance. My spirit is my connection with God.

- Bones form the structure of my body. Muscles keep them together and tendons and muscles together make them move. Blood vessels and nerves travel through the physical flesh, tissues, bones, and muscles, that feed and preserve every part of my body. The digestive system is like a factory that takes raw material and arranges it for my body's use.
- There are two great bellows that move the oxygen I breathe into the bloodstream to keep all parts of my body functioning the way the Great Designer intends.
- From the control tower of my three-pound brain, all of my body is directed to do what it is supposed to do; from avoiding danger, and feeling pain, to the active power of moving my feet and consequently, my whole body from one place to another.
- Around 250 bones are all tied together forming and maintaining the function of all 205 pounds of my body. 33 vertebrae form my spine, 64 bones are in my upper limbs, 62 bones are in my lower limbs, 24 ribs are in a form that keeps my major organs safe, and the 22 bones that are in my head, are all tied together, fed and nurtured to make my body work. Each part of my body is dependent upon other parts and they all make up my whole physical body.

God created the whole person:

This body is one-third of what makes me, me. The purpose of the body is that my soul, my personhood, can function through the five senses that are in this body. It is the intangible person that hears, sees, touches, tastes and smells using the body parts God created out of the dust of the earth. The parts of me that cannot be annihilated, are my soul and spirit. Our life is not a physical thing that can be measured or weighed. God “breathed into man the breath of life and man became a living soul.” Because the Life-Giver gave life, that soul-life never ceases to exist. All that changes and comes to a conclusion is the physical movements and functions of the body. The soul-life is intangible and once it is started, by the very nature of that kind of life, it never stops.

The third part of my personhood is my spirit. That too is without physical attributes but is real and sets human beings apart from other creatures. The ability to reason, not just to react; to know, retain and use that knowledge, and to come to conclusions is part of the function of the human spirit. That is the part of us that makes us unique. We have a mind that we can know, emotions that we can show, and a will that we can make decisions. It is actually the way in which humans were intended to be when God “made man in His own image,” with a mind as He has, that we might know Him; emotions like His so we can love Him, and a will so that we can choose to be like Him and do what He knows is best. The intention of creating human beings in the first place was to be able to share life together. The gift of eternal life is offered to us and can be accepted or rejected. It is not forced upon anyone, otherwise, humans would be no more than a robot without a “mind of their own.”

#### God reveals Himself in the whole Bible as One we can know personally.

There is unity throughout the whole Bible so that we can learn about God and come to know Him personally by faith. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all One in every way as to personhood, and yet each has a separate personality and works in distinct and designed ways to bring us human beings into a relationship with God. To know God is to be able to share life now with Him in a relational way and experience the fellowship and joys of shared events in a life that has meaning and purpose. These first few years of our existence are the training time for what the real intent is for us to be a person, and be able to exist in a meaningful way, forever.

#### 2. The Beginning of the Human Race, 1:26-2

Four methods God used to get mankind into the universe

- Direct creation: Adam – “dust of the ground” implies that there is nothing super-important about our bodies. Our life and worth come from God’s Spirit. The value of our life doesn’t come from our personal achievements but from God Himself.
- Indirect creation: Eve
- Virgin birth: Jesus Christ
- Natural generation: all the rest of humanity

Adam was placed in the garden:

- Under the law of Gen.2:16
- With a suitable help-meet: the essence of marriage – it was in God’s original plan, 2:18. Marriage is God’s idea [Gen.2:18-24]; commitment is essential to successful marriage [Gen.24: 58-60]; romance is important [S. of S. 4:9-10]; marriage holds times of great joy [Jer.33:10-11]; marriage creates the best environment for raising children [Mal.2:14-15]; unfaithfulness breaks that bond of trust [Mat.5:32]; ideally, only death should dissolve marriage [Rom.7:2-3]; marriage is based on the practice of love, not

feelings [Ep.5:21-33]; marriage is a living symbol of Christ and the church [Ep.5:23,32]; marriage is good and honorable [Heb.13:4]

- With the capacity of multiplying
- His food was fruit
- His work was to dress and guard the garden, 2:15
- An enemy was near even at the creation: note the words – guard, 2:15; subdue, 1:28; evil, 2:9

**CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD REVEALED:** Genesis 1. "God said..."

- v.3. Illumination: Who God is. "God is Light..."; "I am the Light of the world."
- v.6. Separation: What God says. "You cannot serve two masters."
- v.9. Manifestation: What God is like. "Order; "By their fruits, ye shall know them."
- v.11. Production: What God intends. Results from a life given. "What shall it profit a man..."
- v.14. Indication: What God designed. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation."
- v.20. Multiplication: Plans God has made. "Follow me and I will make you fishers..."
- v.24. Reproduction: Provisions of God for the future. "Ye must be born again."
- v.26. Identification: People in God's image. "The disciples were called Christians."
- v.28. Benediction: Purpose of God to be fulfilled. "Go ye into all the world ..."
- v.29. Satisfaction: Peace with God the result. "Come unto Me all ye that labor..."

## **GENESIS 2**

*"And the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Gen.2:7*

*"What is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the sons of man that Thou visitest him?" Ps.8:4; Heb.2:6*

*"What is man that Thou should magnify him?" Job 7:17*

*"What is man that Thou should take knowledge of him?" Ps.144:3*

"What is man...?" is a question most people ask of themselves one way or another. When we look at creation, we feel very small by comparison, which is a good healthy way to retain reality. But to dwell on our smallness is not the point. Humility is not self-deprecation. It is rather evidence of respect for others and particularly for God and His greatness and majesty. How can God be concerned for people who consistently disappoint Him? He created us a little lower than angels who have a personhood of their own, and have been given a high position of servant/messengers in the unfolding drama of history that goes far beyond human history. They are expected to do what they are told similar to an employee to his employer. If they refuse or rebel, they are fired, rejected and cast out of the position they held.

Human beings have been created for a different reason. As we read the unfolding accounts of human history in the Bible, humanity began in innocence. Then they moved into a period of time when conscience was the guiding principle for life. They failed in both of these areas of personal and social control. Human governments were formed but even they failed, and in the account of biblical history, the first half of human history is summed up in the first twelve chapters of Genesis. It was then God began to deal with a nation that began with Abraham and the guiding feature was that of promises made, covenants between parties. Promises made by Abraham's descendants were not kept, so laws were given and written down to give clearly stated standards of right and wrong that could not be

avoided. If they broke those laws, there were consequences that resulted that suited the wrong committed. In essence, the “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth,” practice kept order as long as justice was carried out. All of these practices of human conduct were so that people would, of their own free will form a personal relationship with God. Today God has chosen to seek a lasting relationship and spiritual connection with people by the riches of His grace. He has provided that which brings the greatest possible delight and blessings we could ever get – forgiveness of our sins, and acceptance by God. This is offered to us freely but on a legal basis. Death for sin, paid for by the life of an innocent, spotless Person, Jesus Christ; has taken place and now is offered as a gift to those who call on the name of the Lord in faith.

Physically, we are only dust, the same material we walk on; merely a clump composed of the same material we eat as food to sustain our physical life. That material can be formed into something beautiful like a statue that looks life-like, but it has no strength, no ability to recreate, no movement, no life. Our flesh and bones are all of the same material as the earth, and that is all it is at this moment in our existence.

But from the human body, God formed from the dust; He wanted and was able to give more. He gave that body-form, His own kind of life which is different from all other kinds of life. A body crumbles back into dust, but the breath of God is the breath of eternal life and that is an endless existence, an endless principle of function that cannot be stopped because it came from God. Plants and animals were spoken into existence, so their life does not have the breath and personality of God in them. The life of God does not wither or decay. It is timeless and it is endless. When man was made a living soul, each person began an endless journey.

The point of human existence in the first place was to share this eternal life, in its original form, with God forever. It is God’s intention to enjoy the same interest, have the same goals, have the same kind of love, and have the same purpose for existing. To have real joy in something means we have something we can share with other people who have the same interests. But that is only possible and meaningful if both persons want the same things. So, we have been given the option of choosing life with God, or death which is separation from God. Either choice is endless in duration. God did not connive evil. In wisdom and love, He gave each person the privilege of choosing that kind of life or that kind of death.

The human brain is only a small three-pound mass of material, but the breath of God set in motion all kinds of physical, emotional, and spiritual responses in our brains that are consistent with what we know as body, soul, and spirit. The time comes for every person born into this world, to make a choice as to what they think is most important. The majority of people choose to fulfill the desires of only the body and soul. Those things give temporary flashes of pleasure, pride, and proof of our perceived importance. The result is the lust of our flesh, the desire for things we and others see as potentially satisfying, and the personal pride in our accomplishments, control our body and soul. The Bible says, Adam was created as a living soul; created humanity. But it also says Christ, the last Adam who was found in fashion as a Man, is made a life-giving spirit. He provided for a new form of existence that is suited for our eternal life in an eternal body. Spiritual life is not seen nor measurable, but it is as real as any other part of us. It is experienced when the questions which God only can answer, are answered. Those hidden things now become sensible and understandable. Jesus Christ did this by substituting Himself as the One responsible to pay the price of our sin that kept us separated from God.

To accept that gift of eternal life by accepting the Lord Jesus who legally paid the cost of our sins, means that we live now in the spiritual joy of eternal life. Even though all around us is a society that in some ways is good but in many ways is bad, and it is only temporary. We can choose to accept eternal life that holds great beneficial changes now and even when we leave this physical body at physical death. If one does not have eternal life now in their lifetime, there will be no opportunity to change after they die and so will have eternal death. Their body and soul will not be changed because they chose not to be born again. The result will be separation from God in life, and hostility or indifference toward Him, will remain that way. That is why Jesus warned of eternal death to those who choose to reject Him.

## **FIRSTS IN GENESIS 2**

### 1. The First Sabbath ("to cease"). v.1-2

- God did not rest because He was weary. God doesn't become weary (Ps.121:4)
- He ceased His creative work; that task was finished. He blessed the creatures (1:22) and man (1:28). Now He sets the Sabbath apart as a special day. There is no commandment here for people to observe the Sabbath. The next time the Sabbath is brought up is Ex.20:8-11. The Sabbath was given to Israel as a special covenant sign (Ex.31:12-17). There is nothing in scripture that tells the Gentiles to observe the Sabbath. (Ps.147:19-20) makes it clear that the OT law of Moses was given only to Israel.
- Christ observed the Sabbath because He lived in the time and land of the law. He did not follow the man-made rules of the Pharisees (Mk.2:23-280).
- Christians in the early years did meet in the synagogues on the Sabbath until they were driven out by persecution.
- The first day of the week is the Christians' day for fellowship and worship [Acts 20:7; 1 Cor.16:1-3; Rev.1:10]. The first day commemorates the Resurrection [Mat.28:1; Jn.20:1]; the completion of His work in bringing a new creation.
- The Sabbath Day and the Lord's Day are not the same. The Sabbath speaks of rest from labor. The Lord's Day speaks of grace that gives rest followed by work.
- Sabbath keeping is a legalistic keeping of the law that is a mark of immature Christians.
- We don't need to condemn those by comparisons but try to show them what is right

### 2. The First Garden v.4-14

Bible history can be summarized with four gardens

- Eden: a beautiful place where sin entered. In Eden God needed a man to till the ground; the man was responsible to tend the garden; the man was to keep (guard) the garden. The two trees: the tree of life sustained life; the tree of knowledge signifies the authority of God
- Gethsemane: Christ yielded to death for sin by the will of God
- Calvary: where Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead
- Paradise Garden: in heaven where sin shall not enter [Rev.21:1]

### 3. The First Law, v.15-17

- Adam had never sinned but had the ability to sin
- Man can only rule others if he can rule himself

- God wanted us to love Him and obey Him out of our own free will, not out of compulsion or reward
  - The test was just and fair. Adam and Eve had plenty and did not need fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
4. The First Marriage, v.18-25  
The basis of marriage was
- To provide companionship
  - To carry on the human race
  - To help one another bring out the best. To belong to each other.
  - A picture of Christ and the church: a bride, part of His body, a temple where He lives with us

## GENESIS 3

**THE FIRST WORDS OF GRACE.** Gen.3:15. *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”*

### **God has spoken in grace.**

Sin had come in; innocence was gone and man was a guilty creature before God. The one command He gave had been deliberately broken. “Adam by transgression fell.” Like so many today, trying to earn eternal life by doing God’s will, fails because it ignores salvation by grace alone. Free will inserts itself into that which is forbidden, even if there is only one prohibition. Even when we fail and “come short of the glory of God,” the Lord God still speaks to us in mercy and grace. Sin has offended His holiness, and we offend Him with our ingratitude. It seems almost impossible to think that Satan’s lie was trusted rather than God’s truth. We look at that in others and find it hard to believe until we stop to consider ourselves and realize we are as guilty as Adam and Eve. By nature, we are drawn by our own free will to that which is forbidden, but God is full of mercy, goodness, and grace, and is willing to still speak to us – “The Lord God said.” He is not willing that any should perish. He wants every sinner to repent of their sin and put their faith in Him.

### **God spoke in grace to the guilty**

God has taken steps to save us from the consequences of our sinful choices. We have taken steps to perish because of our sins, and yet He wants to save us. Divine love has no limits. Even to those who choose sin, He still comes in love with a desire to recover them and have them in His kingdom. When we are careless, He is caring. When we are helpless to do anything, He does it all. When we deserve nothing, God gives everything – even His only begotten Son. Grace brought Christ from heaven, and on our behalf, calls to heaven and says, “They are Mine!”

### **God provides grace through the seed of the woman**

The Redeemer came from God through the seed of the woman. Man had no part in providing a provision to meet his own need. Even though our Lord Jesus Christ was truly a man, He was a unique Man who was born in the same way we are, yet without sin. He is one of our kind but without a sinful nature. He had flesh and bones as we do, but completely apart from the taint or fruit of human sin and guilt. The Infinite, Almighty, Creator was born of the sinless seed of the woman as an act of infinite grace, that He might bring us back to God.

### **God presents salvation by grace through the seed of the woman**

- Christ was born in humble circumstances to offer salvation to all, no matter who they are, what they have done, and what their present circumstances in life are.
- Joy was in heaven and brought to earth at the birth of the seed of the woman.

- Jesus was a man in man's nature at the same time as remaining the Mighty God in the nature of God. He became a man to redeem us. He remained God to justify us. That is the wonder of all wonders!
- The extent of our debt to mercy and grace is beyond measure, but what a delight it is to our Lord Jesus when grateful hearts open wide to receive Him. The praise, worship, and honor we are able to give Him, delight His heart, and make the travail of His soul, satisfying to Him.
- Abraham rejoiced to look ahead to when the seed of the woman would come and fulfill God's promises to him. John the Baptist, before he was even born, could not retain his emotion when the seed of the woman came near him. Wise men from far away were filled with joy when they saw the seed of the woman as a child.
- Our peace, happiness, and freedom from the consequences of our sins, depends on the seed of the woman. God's justice and truth laid claim on our souls, but the seed of the woman gave His life for us, paying the ransom price.
- In righteousness, He obeyed all God demanded, and He fulfilled all God's law required. His righteousness is now our righteousness.
- In faith we came to Him, and still do. We cling to Him, rest in Him, and never doubt Him nor His compassion and love for us.
- The flame of love and faith makes our heads, hearts, and knees bow in gratitude. We gratefully thank God for sending the seed of the woman in the fullness of time. He revealed to our souls the value, uniqueness, and necessity of the seed of the woman.

## **THE FIRST DEATH**

### **The serpent's head bruised.** Gen.3:15

When we look at this world full of sin, we are saddened and even when we look within ourselves, we wonder at how evil got such rule over human beings. The devil is "the serpent," Rev.12:9; 20:2.

- He obtained his power by deception and continues to deceive people today in the same way he deceived Adam and Eve. People make jokes about the devil as if he is unreal, and he promotes that deception. In that way, he gives evidence that deception works when the Gospel is proclaimed because people under his power reject God's truth.
- His nature is evil. He is the prince of this world [Jn.12:31]. His sway is felt in every part of the world. People are chained by him in many different ways, and some people even choose to serve him [Jn.8:44].
- He is the god of this world [2 Cor.4:4]. His temples are attractive places of fame, pleasure, religion, and money. The cup of pleasure and the cup of error are drained in his temples.
- He is a leader of legions. Demons and people follow him and they are always looking for places that are empty, swept, and garnished. He starts with little children who are born with a sinful nature. They are inclined toward sin even in their innocence and respond to his deception easily and early in life. Whoever and whatever he sees, he goes after to bring down.
- He is a spirit [Eph.2:2]. He plants seeds of evil in the mind. He seeks access to the heart. He dulls the senses and often closes common sense to that which is righteous in order to defile thoughts with every evil imagination. He entered Judas. He filled the heart of Ananias and Saphira, and he still seeks to do his nefarious work today.
- He is strong and crafty. His web may not even be thought of until his victim is caught. He used tried and proven tools and materials of deception and craft to snare Gehazi's weakness. He knew Hezekiah's fame was starting to go to his head and knew a servant girl's simple comment would make Peter willing to deny his Lord.



### **The Almighty One will bruise his head**

- Our Lord has all wisdom which is far greater than “the wiles of the devil.”
- Our Lord took captive the one who had captured us; the slave-owner became a slave; the conqueror was conquered by the Mighty Conqueror, Deliverer, Savior, and Redeemer.
- Our Lord gives deliverance, redemption, and salvation to those who stand under the banner of His mighty victory over sin, death, and hell.
- Our Lord has the supreme power in the universe which is over the power of the devil.

### **The First Death – Abel**

- Abel was a sinner who was hated by Satan. He was exposed to the wiles of the devil in the same way his parents and brother were.
- Abel trusted in the promised seed of the woman for escape from Satan, and Satan could not hold him.
- Abel’s early death by the hand of his murdering brother, Cain, landed him in the kingdom of God, not in the kingdom of hell.
- Abel’s faith in God’s word and in God Himself, responded to his own sense of need by bringing to God an appropriate sacrifice.

### **The Conqueror came as a Man**

- Satan knew Him and had heard God declare His pleasure in His Son
- Satan tried to defeat Him by testing Him for the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, but each test failed, harmless before the word of the Lord.
- Satan was held down by the chains of His holiness, “The Seed of the woman... shall bruise thy head...”
- Satan tried several times to defeat the Lord Jesus Christ before He went to the cross.
- When the Seed of the woman bowed His head and dismissed His spirit, the victory over sin and Satan was won.
- Death itself could not keep Jesus in the grave. He rose in triumph from among the dead! The Conqueror conquered all His foes and bruised forever the head of the devil.
- Believers in our Lord Jesus Christ can conquer by resisting the devil and he will flee, and by drawing near to God and He will draw near to us.
- In the word of God, we read of those who fought and won over the opposition of Satan and those he used. Stephen, Paul, Peter, and others were “more than conquerors through Him that loved them.”
- Down through the centuries since the church began, the faith of faithful martyrs and faithful laborers has remained strong as they went, by the power of God, to “preach deliverance to the captives” in many parts of the world.
- “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly [Rom.16:20].” The enemy is dashed in pieces by the One who overthrows those who rise up against Him and His own people.

**COVERING FOR THE GUILTY.** Gen.3:21. *“Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made them coats (tunics) of skin and clothed them.”*

### **There is only One Access to God**

- From Abel to John the Baptist, Old Testament believers rejoiced in the hope that was yet to come. They all looked by faith to the same Object of their faith.

- The Patriarchs and the Apostles believed in the same Person. The first group rejoiced by faith as they looked forward to the Promised One, and the second group rejoiced as by sight they looked on the Promise fulfilled.
- Every person traveling through this life, and who will rest in the promised blessing of eternal life now and forever, travel the same road of faith, guided by the same compass of truth through the word of God, through the bestowing of faith by God's grace, to the same destination. "Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there."

### **The Lord Jesus Christ is the One Way**

- Adam and Eve were still in the Garden of Eden when their sin was exposed and their innocence was lost. But it was also in the garden that the first death occurred. It was the death of an innocent animal for guilty sinners. They were conscious of their shame. They tried to hide themselves personally and physically from God.
- God in mercy came to their relief. He knew what they had done and He knew what was needed to maintain justice and still be able to communicate with people who put their faith in Him. No longer could they look upon Him because of the consequences of sin, but by faith, they could put their trust in Him and act upon God's word.
- God Himself supplied their need. He made the coats of skin to cloth them as the result of the death of an innocent substitute. These were not made from plant life but from a lifeless animal whose blood was shed.
- "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission." "It pleased the Lord" to have a life given by one who was sinless, to preserve the life of the guilty.
- The blood was shed, and the sacrifice was made as an offering for sin. That scene would have been indelibly impressed on Adam and Eve so that they would pass on to their sons the need for a sacrifice for sin and how to offer it.
- The simplicity of the act of substitution is easily understood. The profoundness of the length and breadth of that truth is far greater. That truth is the key to heaven as we look ahead, and the nurturing of our souls here. This is expressed in the simplicity of the Gospel. "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and He was buried and rose again the third day, according to the scriptures."
- God's eye was on the innocent victim, and when the sinners were clothed in the skin of the innocent, He could look again at those who were covered with those skins that had no blemish.
- Their righteousness was lost, but the sinlessness of the substitute was imputed to them. The righteousness of the Righteous One, our Lord Jesus Christ, has been passed on to us. He is "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS," and now we are named, "The Lord our righteousness."
- A man as pure as God, as holy as God is holy, as perfect as God is perfect, as sinless as God is sinless, has taken our place before the searching eye of God.

### **The Lord Jesus Christ is the Only Substitute**

- The eyes of the Holy God were always on the Perfect Substitute for sinful mankind.
- There was never an absence of love in Him, in any thought, in any word He said or deed He did. He endured all trials without fault. He experienced all temptations without ever sinning. The path He walked was full of danger and it was slippery, but He never stumbled nor slipped. He was attacked on every side by every possible means, but never failed nor fell.
- He lived before God as a Perfect man among men. He stood before God in full, unflinching, unbroken obedience. He had a work designated for Him to do, and He accomplished that work. He finished it to the smallest detail.

- All that He did here on earth glorified God, and it was for our – “for our sake, our peace to make!” He planned His own work, He carried it out completely, and then He gives it to every exposed sinner who will flee to Him in faith. It is there they will find hope and shelter in Christ.
- He offers “The Righteousness of God,” to everyone, and when a person puts faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that becomes theirs personally. This offer is “unto all, and upon all that believe.”
- He was made to be sin for us, He who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. We are made, in Christ, the righteousness of God.
- Adam’s innocence was lost, but a robe of innocence was put on him provided by the death of another. That was physical and human. We have a divine covering that can never be soiled or lost. Adam’s skin coat has long gone to dust. Our robe of righteousness is unfading and not subject to decay or loss.
- The garment of salvation God provides is available to all. Ask, and you receive. Seek with earnest faith and it is right there to be found. Christ’s worthiness is there for our unworthiness; His sinlessness for our sinfulness; His purity for our impurity; His sincerity for our guile; His truth for our falseness; His love for our hate; His righteousness for our unrighteousness.
- 2Tim.4:8. *“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.”*

### 1. Temptation. 3:1-6

- The tempter: God does not tempt people to sin. Satan fell into sin before he was in the garden [Isa.14:12-17; Ez.28:11-19]. He took the guise of a serpent. He is a liar and a deceiver. In Gen.4 he is a liar that murders [Jn.8:44]. He must be avoided and resisted.
- The target: Eve's mind [2Cor.11:1-3; 1Tim.2:9-15]. He deceived her. Man's mind is part of our being in God's image. Satan attacked God by attacking the human mind.
- The tactic: Satan tries to get the mind to doubt God's Word. He questions God's Word; denies God's Word; substitutes His own lies. When we question God's goodness and doubt His love, we play into Satan's hands, "You will be like God."
- The tragedy: Eve gave place to the devil [Ep.4:27] instead of resisting. She omitted "freely" and added "touch it;" "you shall surely die" became "lest you die." the lust of the flesh ("good for food"); the lust of the eyes ("pleasant to the eyes"); the pride of life ("desirable to make one wise") [1Jn.2:15]

### 2. Condemnation 7-19

- Internal v.7-14: loss of innocence and a sense of guilt, fear, and shame; self-defense and blame - the internal effects of sin
- External, v.14-19: the serpent crawled in the dust. The woman had pain in childbirth. The man exchanged the paradise of Eden for the wilderness and would find thorns and sweat in his labor.
- Eternal, v.15: The seed of the woman would defeat Satan and his seed. Satan will oppose the family of God and God Himself. He will ultimately be cast into hell. The conflict between God's seed and Satan's seed is the story of the OT. The NT is the record of the birth of Christ and His victory over Satan through the work of the cross.

### 3. Salvation 20-24

- The coats of skin are the first picture of the shedding of blood as the atonement of sin
- The offering of an innocent life for the guilty person
- The leaves could not cover sin and shame. Works do not make us accepted by God.
- Garments in the Bible, are often pictures of salvation: the prodigal son, etc.
- God showed grace by driving them out of the garden, otherwise they would have lived forever in their sinful state. God showed His grace and mercy to the whole human race this way.
- The death of Christ didn't just put us back where Adam was when he sinned. It has given us a place where we will live with Him forever.

3. The Beginning of Human Sin, 3:1-7. Without the privilege of choice, humans would have been prisoners, and obeying God would not be a joy in any way.

Sin – what it is:

- Rebellion, De.9:7
- Thought of foolishness, Pr.24:9
- Not of faith, Rom.14:23
- Knowing to do good and not doing it, Jas.4:17
- Transgression of the law, 1Jn.3:4
- All unrighteousness, 1Jn.5:17

Origins of sin:

- Act of disobedience, Gen.3:6-7; Rom.5:12
- From within, Mat.15:19
- The devil, Jn.8:44; 1Jn.3:8

Characteristics of sin:

- Causes reproach, Pr.14:34
- Abomination, Pr.15:9
- Filthiness, Pr.30:12
- As scarlet (obvious to others), Is.1:18
- Separates from God, Is.59:2
- Defiling, Is.59:3
- Hateful, Jer.44:9
- Unfruitful, Ep.5:11
- Deceitful, Heb.3:13
- Hardens, Heb.3:15
- Emphasizes man's work, Heb.6:1; Heb.9:14
- Lusting results in wrong-doing, Jas.1:15

Downward steps:

- Doubt, v.1
- Distortion, v.3
- Denial, v.4
- Disobedience, v.6

The Appeal: [1Jn.2:16]

- Lust of the flesh – “good for food.”
- Lust of the eye – “pleasant to the eyes.”
- Pride of life – “desired to make one wise.”

The Results of Adam’s eating of the tree

- He disobeyed the law he had received (before Eve was formed)
- He became a sinner
- He fell victim to a far lesser opponent than Eve
- Showed that Eve had only done what he would have done
- Condoned her action

Adam tried to

- Hide himself, v.8 [Rev.5:15-16; 20:11]
- Excuse himself, v.12 [Rom.1:20-21; 2:1]
- Clothe himself, v.7 [v.21]

Effects of sin

- Upward: challenged God’s authority
- Inward: Spiritual – alienated from God; death  
Moral – conscience within  
Physical – down-grading diet which led to death and decay
- Downward: animals and vegetables cursed  
Animals became aggressive  
Vegetables became noxious; thorny; out of control  
Earth yielded its fruit reluctantly
- Forward: all mankind fell under the doom of death

#### 4. The Beginning of the Revelation of Redemption, 3:8-24

## GENESIS 4

**THE MORE EXCELLENT SACRIFICE (Heb.11:4).** Gen.4:4. *“Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering.”*

### **The brief life of Abel**

- Instead of in the Garden of Eden where for Adam and Eve, each task would have been a delight, Abel was born into an outside place where labor and difficulties were continual. Every day would have been a struggle against the elements, the thorns and thistles, and the constant need for effort put forth for survival.
- He would have learned that sin has its consequences. Reason in his own mind would have convinced him he was a sinner. His conduct of life indicated he feared God.
- The principle of faith in God was in his heart. That affected his conduct. The problems caused by sin surrounded him, but the cycle of life he observed as a shepherd, would have instructed his mind to the fact that there was a Life-Giver far greater than he.
- By faith he offered his personal sacrifice to God. His trust was in God. He would have relied on God’s word and example of providing a blood-ransom price for sin. His parents would have told him of the first death of an innocent creature for their sin. When God speaks, faith hears, believes, and obeys. Faith expects the revelation of a promise, to be fulfilled. Faith rests on the word of the Lord and takes appropriate action.

- God opens the mind and hearts of those who believe in Him, and who follow the directions God gives.
- It is likely Abel's parents told him of the seriousness of disobeying God and the results of their willful choice. As a child of wrath with a sinful nature, he would know he was in need of a sinless substitute. When he brought a lamb and identified himself with that sacrifice, he would be accepted by God.
- It was expected that he would act in faith based on the words he heard from God through his parents, and perhaps in a personal way from God. In this action, he would testify that righteousness was imputed to him on the basis of the sinless sacrifice.
- In humility, faith, and love, he would have stood at that altar with his heart bowed low, and his face toward the blood of the victim that was being burned. In some personal way, he knew the sacrifice made him the recipient of divine grace.
- He had looked away from himself to another, a Savior of whom the lamb was a type. In faith, he trusted in the Living God without any merit, labor, or power of his own.
- He would have been conscious of God's mercy that was so suitable to his need; God's unmerited favor toward him and the effectiveness of the sacrifice to meet God's demands.
- He would likely have left that altar and gone back to his work with a load lifted from his soul, peace in his heart, a purpose to live as God intended, and perhaps a smile on his face.

### **The Sad Life of Cain**

- He was born with a sinful nature and had parental instruction and the same advantages that Abel had.
- Spiritual character depends on what we do with truth. Truth melted Abel's heart so he responded to God's will. Truth hardened Cain's heart so that he exalted himself before God.
- Self-will is a sad sight. He discovered who he was and he was willing to come before God, but he came in his own way. It looked good to his own eyes, but the beautiful aspect and disguise of the fruit of the cursed earth did not provide the blood necessary for the remission of sins.
- Self-will was the mark of Cain's apostate religion. He thought his way was more suitable to the beauty of earth and heaven, and the dignity of man. Cain put his own reasoning above the counsel of God.
- Self-will is delusional. It makes a man a god in his own eyes and leaves him in the darkness of his own conceited opinion of himself.
- Self-will generates pride in one's self. Creation from the dust of the earth and sin leaves man in the physical sense no more than dust, and yet pride makes people walk in pompous self-glory.
- Self-will does not feel the pangs of sin nor the need for pardon. It does not need an offering of the blood of the Redeemer.
- Self-will closes one's eyes to the truth, to the Lord Jesus Christ, to faith, and closes the heart to the divine entreaties of grace and the offer of forgiveness. Self-will doesn't think it has any need for forgiveness.
- Self-will leads to an awful end. It can move one to uncontrolled anger that is so great it wants to extinguish light; to belittle and berate truth and those who hold truth. It led Cain to murder his brother.

- Self-will can lead to deliberately neglecting and rejecting the “more excellent sacrifice,” our Lord Jesus. It leads to neglecting and rejecting the mercy of God and submitting to the curse of damnation and the woes it brings.
- Self-will only thinks of the present and spurns the consequences of sin as being untrue, unfair, and nonexistent.

### **The Life God gives**

- It is a life cleansed from the power and consequences of sin because of God’s gracious forgiveness. The “more excellent sacrifice” of Christ presents us spotless before God.
  - It is a life of peace that is made in spite of the threats and attacks of Satan against the cleansed sinner.
  - It is a life of sanctification and conformity to Christ. Holiness is imparted by God. Jesus has “perfected forever them that are sanctified.” We are accepted in Christ.
  - It is a life of rejoicing in Christ Jesus and having no confidence in the flesh.
5. The Beginning of Family Life, 4:1-15  
Offerer and offerings, v.1-7
- Thank offering (gift): motives
  - Sin offering: the reason for
- Sinner and Sin: 1-16
- Religious Cain condemned by righteous Abel
  - Wrong approach
  - Cain was an apostate (Jude)
  - The sin of bringing a wrong offering could be dealt with
  - The sin of rejection is an unpardonable sin
- Apostate and apostasy: 17-24
- Rejection may begin with the one word “but.”
  - Attitudes are caught, not taught
  - Evil has great power – Lamech
- Promised One and the Promise: 25-5:32
- What God plans; Satan can’t stop – Seth
  - The name of the Lord is the authority that must be submitted to
  - God recognizes and is involved in families
  - Righteousness has greater power than sin
6. The Beginning of Godless Civilization, 4:16-9  
When left to themselves, people tend to get worse rather than better. In spite of the variety of talents and abilities that God gives, sin develops continuously as time passes. Two groups of people appeared: those who showed indifference to sin and evil and those who call on the name of the Lord. Seth and his descendant took Abel’s place as the line of faithful people.
7. The Beginning of the Nations of the World, 10
8. The Beginning of Confusion of Languages, 11

## **GENESIS 5**

### **ADAM’S DESCENDANTS.** From Adam to Noah

Genealogies remind us that people are important to God as individuals as well as members of families. Genealogies are more than just lists of names to preserve family traditions. In the Bible, these lists confirm the promise of God that the promised “seed of the woman” would come. When that promise was made, Abraham as the father of the Jews wasn’t born, so the first list was a reminder to all of humanity that Jesus Christ would come as the Perfect Man to bear away the sin of the world.

All humans are related, in that we share one blood no matter where we are on the face of the earth. Our common ancestry in the flesh from Adam and Eve takes us across all man-made barriers of prejudice. Humans create walls between themselves for all kinds of reasons. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, provision has been made for every man, woman, and child who will personally claim the sacrifice for sin for themselves, by repenting of their sin and putting faith in Christ to be saved. The lists in scripture remind us that each person is a unique and valuable creation of God. He created each one with the intention of having them share life and fellowship with Him if they choose to. The sin barrier has brought death to all humans because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But the door is open to all to enter into this relationship with Him by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**The Comfort.** Gen.5:29. *“This same shall comfort us.”*

As humanity increased in number, it also increased in wickedness. Those who were godly began to come together and then marry those who were sinful, causing a breakdown of morality. Once that deterioration begins, it rapidly increases until what God intended people to be, has no resemblance to that which He created us to be. Instead of glorifying God and enjoying fellowship with him, people choose to do evil and follow the downward path of sin.

When Noah was born to Lamech, Lamech lifted his voice in hope and with words of joy said, “This same shall comfort us.” The name “Noah,” and the word “comfort” sound quite similar in the Hebrew language. Noah was the one who would bring comfort to sinful humanity in his preaching of righteousness and in the building of the ark to preserve a remnant of people who knew and trusted God. When the flood was passed, God recognized Noah’s sacrifice on the altar and promised He would not lay a further curse on the ground. Sorrow remains and weariness from labor remains, and the heart of man has not changed – but God gives us hope when we look at our Lord Jesus Christ as His Ark of Safety for us today.

### **The Consolation**

When our Lord Jesus Christ came, consolation came to a sin-sick world. Christ is our ark of Safety. He is a place of refuge for every person who will choose to enter into that Ark by faith.

- The bitterness of sin brings misery and grief to every lost soul. The misery of the heart and soul brings distress and anguish because of the wages of sin which is death.
- Consolation does not come from the earth itself or the world system. Neither has anything to offer to meet the need of those who are deliberately blinded by sin. Consolation and comfort must come down from heaven. “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be made rich.”
- Consolation comes when our Lord Jesus raises us up from the depths of sin and reveals the Father to us. He demonstrated His love to us when He dealt personally on our behalf with our guilt. He paid the full price of sin by suffering the consequences of sin in our place.
- The consolation and comfort we now have, comes from God alone. His justice has found satisfaction in the saving work of Christ on the cross.



- On this journey of life, a believer finds consolation in times of difficulties by knowing that our Redeemer lives, and our life now is hidden with Christ in God. Affliction and persecutions will come, but faith in our Lord Jesus gives consolation on sorrow and trouble.
- Health may fade and earthly possessions be lost, but our consolation and comfort in our Lord Jesus Christ remain.
- Friends may leave us and foes may challenge and invade us, but our consolation remains untouched.
- Treachery and death may come one right after the other, but Jesus Christ, our Consolation and Comfort, is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
- When we walk with the Lord through the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil because our Consolation and Comfort are with us. He is faithful to His own people when they are in peril, in storms, in fearful attacks, and in times of potential despair.
- It is from the well of springing water that He gives, we can hear and experience the words of this hymn personally...

*Come, ye disconsolate, where 'er ye languish,  
Come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel;  
Here bring your wounded hearts,  
Here tell your anguish,  
Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.*

*Joy of the desolate, light of the straying  
Hope of the penitent, fadeless and pure!  
Here speaks the Comforter,  
Tenderly saying,  
"Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot cure."*

*Here see the bread of life, see waters flowing  
Forth from the throne of God, pure from above.  
Come to the feast of love;  
Come ever knowing,  
Earth has no sorrow but heaven can remove.*

## **GENESIS 6**

### **STARTING OVER**

The low spiritual condition on earth as a whole became notably wicked before God. It is frightening to think how quickly people who know about God but glorify Him not as God, can sink into the depths of sin. The first seven verses of this chapter give us a view of how God sees sin on the earth. However, in all of this evil that had taken over the world, there was one man and his family who were conscious of God, lived before God, and in the case of Noah at least, walked with God. So, verses eight through ten give us the encouragement that "The Lord knows them that are His," in spite of all the departure and evil around. Verses eleven through sixteen tell us of the need for the ark and what God intended it to be used for and how it was to be built. "By faith, Noah built an ark to the saving of his house." The last verses of the chapter tell us of God's grace in action.

### **The low spiritual condition of humanity**

- The descendants of Cain and Seth comingled and intermarried. Instead of righteousness increasing, evil thoughts in the mind of people led to evil actions and practices until sin abounded on the earth wherever people were found. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”
- When the separation needed between the children of wrath and the children of God is ignored, the evil heart of man claims the souls of the offspring and wickedness increases with every passing generation.
- God does not excuse or ignore such sin, and verse three pronounced sentence upon humans by limiting the age to which they would live from then on. God shows mercy to sinful people but there is a limit to the time of mercy.
- The inward wickedness of human hearts that are opposed to divine authority, causes people to be known for their gigantic wickedness in the sight of God. The inward nature of sin was revealing itself in the outward actions of evil and extreme wickedness. “As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in days of the coming of the Son of Man.”
- God’s sorrow when He “saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,” is in contrast to when “God saw everything that He had made; and indeed, it was very good.”
- God’s grief reveals the passionate involvement He has toward us. “He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” He grieves over those to whom He gave life so that they could know Him and love Him, but instead, they turn away from Him to evil practices produced by evil hearts.
- God’s compassion in no way diminishes His sovereignty. His foreknowledge of people and events does not mean He is hard-hearted. Rather, it shows His personal interest in each person and what each of us will choose to do with His offer of grace and salvation.
- In the midst of this universal prevalence of sin, there were those who were godly. Noah’s great-grandfather Enoch had walked with God and was taken into heaven without dying. His grandfather Methuselah, was nine-hundred-sixty-nine years old when he died just before the flood. Likely he had passed on to his son Lamech (the good Lamech) the fact that God is real so that right from when Noah was born, he found comfort in the midst of the hard work sin had caused.

### **Before the flood**

- “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” He was different. He was a man of integrity and was blameless before the evil people among whom he lived.
- His connection to God was so unique, that he would have been known as “a preacher of righteousness” by his life and conduct as well as his words and warnings of judgment to come.
- The character of Noah was in striking contrast to the evil of all in society that was around him.

### **Noah in the old world**

- He lived in the middle of all the evil of the sons of Adam but lived separately from the evil that had come from Adam’s choice. Open sin had ultimately covered all the earth where humanity dwelt and corrupted the whole world.
- In contrast to all the wickedness that was around him, was Noah; “A just man, and perfect in all his generations, and Noah walked with God” [Gen.6:9;12].
- The fleshly mind always brings corruption, but the spiritual mind bears witness against both the fleshly and carnal minds of people. The spiritual mind is true to God and faithful to God’s word.

- Carnality of mind reveals itself in all that it does. It is open to scrutiny as to the right that it does not do, as well as the wrong that it is inclined to do and often does.
- The new nature imparted at the new birth of a person, places an individual into a whole new world of living for the things that are eternal.
- Even though Noah walked with God, he was not taken out of the corrupted world like Enoch. He was not removed from all the evil influences and powers around him. The new birth does not mean that we are made sinlessly perfect so that we can walk through this world untouched by all that is going on around us, nor does it mean that we will never be tempted by that which pleases the fleshly part of our humanity. The new birth doesn't improve the old nature. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ makes us a new creation in Him and by Him, so that we can live for God "In the midst of a crooked and perverse nation."
- Living for God is a way chosen by God, to reveal Christ to those in darkness, by the evidence of new life in Christ that shines as light in the darkness of sin. Such a new life is so far superior to the disappointments, disillusionments, and dissatisfaction of the life of the flesh, that those who choose sin are uncomfortable when a believer in Christ is around.
- Noah was brought higher into the joy, liberty, and glory of living in the conscious presence of God. There is a great difference between the blindness of sin, and the light of righteousness; from the purposelessness of doing what is wrong or self-centered, to the glorious objective of living for the Lord.
- The results of the spiritual mind that has been given life imparted by God when faith is put in Him, is that the Holy Spirit has regenerated by grace that person who has put their unreserved faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The mixing of the fleshly affections of the world with the spiritual influences of those whose faith was real, has produced "giants" of confusion that have taken control of the world system, society in general, and the religious systems of man's making. It has reached into churches, families, homes, and individuals to the extent that right and wrong seem to be indiscernible to most people.
- Confusion, uncertainty, anxiety, grief, and the unfruitful works of darkness are results that come when evil is allowed to continue unchecked.

**Noah built the ark.** *"Noah did everything just as God commanded him,"* [6:22 NIV]

- Noah's spiritual mind remained uncorrupted by all that was going on around him. In faith "the axe was laid to the root of the trees," and the works of evil and the days of evil were numbered. Judgment was coming as sure as the boards and beams were formed by Noah as he did the work God commanded him.
- There was one door of access into the ark of safety. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one door to salvation. There is no other way to God. There was a window to give light to the whole inside of the ark. The light of the word of God through Christ who is the Light, is the only clear way to understand the will of God. That open window would have given the air of divine grace available to every creature inside that ark.
- The ark was made to divine specifications, not according to the limited knowledge of human "scientific" minds. The result was the most efficient way to use the ark to capacity and still is used in similar ways today.

**Lessons to be learned**

- In evil days, God has a remnant of people of faith left here on earth to bear witness for the Lord. They have an impact on those around them, but they cannot make people enter the "ark of safety" from the coming judgment that is going to fall on the earth. God offers salvation to

all, but the result that He chooses is the result of each individual's response to the invitation to receive Christ by faith.

- The ark is an outward figure containing an inward, unseen kingdom of living souls that are alive in Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is alive and well, even though the minds of people are focused on the evils of humanity.
- Our strength is in the cross alone where we are safe because of the atoning work of Christ. We died with Him. We are saved by Him. We are kept safe for eternity through him in spite of all that is going on around us or all that will come as evil men and seducers wax worse, deceiving and being deceived.

### **Noah the man**

- His Position, v.8. *"Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."* The foundation of a believer's life is God's grace.
- His Attitude, v.9. *"Noah was a righteous man."* Sincere, right before God.
- His Character, v.9. *"Noah... was perfect..."* Upright, genuine in the sight of God.
- His Testimony, v.9. *"In his generations."* His life was a true witness to God in dark times
- His Fellowship, v.9. *"Noah walked with God."* He had friendship and fellowship with God
- His Conduct, v.22. *"Thus did Noah."* All that was said about Noah was proved by his obedience to God.
- His Thoroughness, v.22. *"According to all God commanded him."* The standard by which he lived was the word of God.

## **GENESIS 7**

### **SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD**

Gen.7:1. *"The Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house (family) into the ark."*

Against the black background of a wicked world that sent the awful scent of moral and spiritual corruption into the nostrils of the holy God who had created it, and who saw the wickedness of people was great everywhere, God still demonstrated His love. When He finished creating the world and all that is on it, God said it was "very good." He was in the ark when in love, He called Noah and his family to join Him inside.

In love, He still values the potential of every human being in spite of the wickedness of man that is great on the earth today. It is the same today as it was in Noah's day, and the Lord Jesus said it was at such a time the Son of Man would come.

In grace, God designed an ark of safety for Noah, a man of faith, and for his family. The plans were made by God, but Noah had to act on those plans. The same is true for us today. The way of salvation has been made plain and there is nothing to be added to it or taken away from it. It is by grace alone we are saved when we put our faith in Him. He has provided the Lord Jesus Christ to be our personal Savior, and He will save any person who will believe the word of God and through its message, put their personal faith in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

In holiness, God demands that sin be dealt with in the one way that is consistent with His own character. Death for sin is the divine requirement. Sin cannot enter the presence of God and He does

not overlook sin nor excuse it. He demands full payment as the wages of sin. Nothing that defiles can enter into the presence of God who is absolutely holy, righteous, and pure.

In justice, God's judgment falls on all who have sinned, and we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Therefore, we are all condemned by nature in a legal way before the throne of divine justice. God's judgment falls in full force on those who refuse His offer of grace that has made a way that our sins can be dealt with legally and forever. "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." "God demonstrated His love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The Son of God who loved me, "gave Himself for me."

In righteousness, God warns of coming judgment well in advance so that people can prepare to meet God. In His warnings, He tells of coming judgment upon sinners and gives in plain words, the consequences of rejecting His mercy and His gift of salvation by grace alone. He offers that gift and the eternal life that is the present possession of all who put their faith in Him.

In mercy, God withholds just vengeance until it is made plain to all involved that there are lasting consequences to all who spurn His pardon and forgiveness that is offered on the easiest possible terms. "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast." Those who will not accept what God freely offers, are responsible for their- own future in the lost eternity of the damned.

In startling suddenness, His wrath will fall and its full power be unleashed on the wickedness of earth. The door of salvation and the opportunity is open, but when the time comes for God to shut the door, it will happen quickly. The door won't gradually shut. The invitation to enter into the kingdom of God is through the wide-open door. When the invitation time is over, the door will be shut and holy justice will drop its hammer of eternal condemnation on all those who refused to repent of their sin to God and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Shut in.** Gen.7:16. "*The Lord shut him in.*"

- When a person has accepted the work of Christ on the cross on their behalf, that person is saved from sin and saved from the world of lost sinners.
- Being "prisoners of hope," like Noah and his family locked in the ark, preserves us, and is far better than the freedom of those who are without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world. Those who are saved are safe "in Christ."
- God has shut us in by making us safe "in Christ." If we were not shut in, we would perish in our sins. We will be considered by many to be "narrow-minded," cut off from the mainstream of society, foolish, and unwilling to communicate in ways that are acceptable to the ways of the world. It is a blessed restraint to be "shut in" by God from the evil and its consequences that are going on in the lives of those who are "outside" of the ark that is Christ.

**The Flood.** Gen.7:17. "*The flood was on the earth.*"

- The elements of destruction and purification of the earth were let loose to do their work. Floods of lust, temptation, and every evil thing, break loose from all restraint and have to be done away with, by the greater flood of justice and cleansing.
- The flood outside the ark destroyed and crushed the life out of all those who lived in sin. Such a life is a judgment of sorts in itself because it leaves only misery, disappointment, and loss to those who are deceived by it. The fear of death still makes people fear today who are outside

of Christ. The liberty they wanted, doesn't deal with the soul-damning problem of sin and doesn't remove the consequences of sin. The waters of judgment are far different from the baptism of identification of believers who have entered the ark which is Christ by faith. Our judgment is passed. Those outside have the judgment of the raging waters of divine wrath and the baptism of fire forever.

**Through the Flood.** Gen.7:18. *"The ark went upon the face (surface) of the waters."*

- We are not saved from death and judgment, but through it and out of it. Temptations are around us and they are real. We are affected by them but are not subject to them.
- We are helpless in ourselves, but by the grace that provided the ark for Noah and Christ, our Savior/Ark, for us, we are able to be taken safely through the floods of temptation and any other pressures the dark waters might lay upon us.
- Deliverance and triumph come later, but God is in the ark with us. He will not allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear.

### **Noah preserved**

- The Divine Invitation, v.1. *"Come thou..."* The first time the word "come" is used in the Bible is for Noah to be in the ark with God.
- The Divine Observation, v.1. *"Thee have I seen..."* Believers can give God pleasure.
- The Divine Requirement, v.1. *"Righteous before Me."* This is what God demands.
- The Divine Testimony, v.1. *"Righteous before Me in this generation."* God bears witness to others regarding those who believe in Him.
- The Divine Commandment, v.5. *"The Lord commanded him."* God speaks, man listens; God commands, and man obeys.
- The Divine Protection, v.16. *"The Lord shut him in."* His safety depended on the Lord alone
- The Divine Preservation, 8:1. *"The Lord remembered Noah."* God's servants are not forgotten by their Lord.

## **GENESIS 8**

**The Wind.** Gen.8:1. *"God remembered Noah and caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided."*

- We are shut up, lifted up, and passing through the waters, but we are safe in Christ.
- The Holy Spirit in the believer breathes peace to our souls in times of fear, and He keeps us from fear. He speaks peace to our souls. He refreshes our souls from His word which He has "breathed," so we can breathe heavenly air even though we are here in this ungodly world that is going fast toward judgment.
- The breath of God this time did not destroy, but brought about deliverance.
- The tossing and turning of just judgment on sin has passed, and its effects decrease because quiet peace is coming and is near at the present time.

### **The Ark Rests.**

- Even though the world is not seen and the waters of judgment are still there, the rest of assurance in the future becomes a present reality to us. "We shall not be moved."
- The work of Christ on the cross has brought us to the solid ground of safety by faith in Him. We are not always able to see the results of the cross-work, but the settled fact of God's satisfaction gives us rest. We rest where God rests; on the finished work of Christ.

- It may be a while before we enter into the fullness of what God has provided for us. Suffering may be our portion for a season, but joy comes in the morning. That joy settles, strengthens, secures, and establishes us in our faith.

### **The Open Window.**

- New light entered the ark and hidden things were revealed. New light has entered through the open window to our souls and we are amazed at all that is revealed of this new day and new life in which we live. Those things that seemed isolated and unconnected, are now open to let us see the hill-tops of future joys.
- The little we know about the future, brings us joy in the present. “Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for them that love Him.”
- The old is gone, destroyed, and dead. The new life is real, vital, alive, and flourishing with the new life of the new creation. The dove of peace with its gentle sounds, promises better things ahead.
- Resurrection-rest has been given to us and we can enjoy that fullness and the fullness of the new life we have, every single day.

### **Full Liberty.**

- Purity has taken the place of impurity in thoughts, words, and actions. Sin become abhorrent to our new nature.
- Gentleness and peace become real to us and we can make them our own instead of restlessness and uncertainty.
- Our spirits become quiet and controlled rather than corrupt and boisterous, noisy and offensive.
- New life is larger, freer, and better, and our dwelling place is peaceful as we live in Christ and with Him beyond and above the wickedness of earth. That has passed and is gone as far as we are concerned. We live on new, cleansed, and higher ground.

### **601 YEARS.** Gen.8:20. *“Noah built an altar unto the Lord.”*

For over five-hundred years, Noah had lived in the ungodly world that was increasing in wickedness and the corruption of sin was everywhere. In every area of human life, sin was abounding. However, through this awful mudslide of moral and spiritual evil, “Noah walked with God.” That man of faith knew personally the sanctifying power of grace. “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

A godly person of faith can avoid being moved by the morass of human evil that is motivated by all the powers of darkness that are arrayed against God. Such a person can please God! A true child of God is ready to obey his or her heavenly Father and finds it a delight to do so. A person of faith will trust God’s word. One who loves God will submit to His guidance. In faith, a person who knows the Lord Jesus Christ will find prayer and praise to be natural to them. These are normal responses by those who have faith in God and seek to walk with Him on a consecrated road. Even though others all around us walk on the downward, broad road, the narrow upward road on which we go against the tide of human opinion and experience, is the one on which we want to travel through life.

When God said to Noah, “Make thee an ark,” he didn’t hesitate but started right away knowing that was the only way to save his family. When the Lord said, “Come thou and all thy house into the ark,” he immediately went in. When Noah was six-hundred years, two months, and seventeen days old, he went into the ark. When he was six-hundred-one years, two months, and twenty-seven days old, he

went out of the ark at the call of God, to begin a new life. Stepping out of that ark into total silence, in contrast to the noise and tumult of evil when he went in, would have been both an awful and awesome contrast.

There was no sound of animals or birds except those from the animals that came out of the ark after him. There were no sounds of children playing, people talking or business being conducted. There were no sounds of raucous pleasure-seeking people, shouting with laughter, screaming with fear, or crying with sorrow and remorse. There was nothing but a soundless, silent world in which new plant life was growing. It must have been like standing on a grave at the dawning of a new day like Mary Magdalene experienced when the new day of grace began.

I wonder what I would have thought or what I would have done as the first action of response to the first voice I heard on that day of new beginnings. The KJV of the Bible says that God said, "Go forth," but other versions say God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark." Whatever the way the voice of God was heard, Noah obeyed God still, even after being shut in for a year and ten days. It is a normal reaction from the heart of a true child of God, to want to thank Him, worship Him and praise Him after passing through an unknown and very traumatic experience such as never happened before.

He had entered the ark when the earth was a riot of evil and noise that accompanies the deeds of sin. He exited the ark to the silence of cleansing and purity. That awe-inspiring scene moved him to worship God before doing another thing. "It is God's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes." Behind Noah and his wife came his sons and their wives, and behind them came the animals and living creatures to spread out and replenish the earth.

Noah didn't start building pens for cattle or folds for sheep. "Noah built an altar unto the Lord." He had walked with God before building and entering the ark. He had waited a full year and more with God while in the ark. Now he came out to a cleansed world, and as a true child of God, worshipped God at the altar he built as his first act after his great deliverance.

It is perfectly normal for a believer to give God thanks, and in doing so, worship Him as the first action of a new life in Christ. He who is First has the first we have to give. He who is the Best shall have the best we can offer on the altar of worship we erect in our souls and live by in our lives. The Altar is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. The offering on the Altar and the shed blood is a foreshadowing of Christ and what He did for us on the cross. The normal first act of a new believer is to bless the One who blessed us and bended knees and uplifted hands and heart is a natural posture that we take in respect and reverence to God as we seek to give honor to the One who saved us.

We must never allow Satan to demand we apply ourselves to our earthly responsibilities before we give God His due. The enemy of God and believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will seek to make us take care of business, building buying, and selling before worshipping, praying, and giving God first place. If a work doesn't begin with God it won't end with God. If a relationship doesn't begin with God in it, it won't have God as the binding cord in it. If earthly claims are the focus of your attention, the altar of human tools and human rubbish will be all you have. It will all be only rubbish at its best. Anything added to what God has done leaves the whole thing valueless.

## **The Altar**



- The Altar represents and proclaims our Lord Jesus Christ as our means of approach to God. By virtue of the fact that He was once offered for sin, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God is what makes the sacrifice on the Altar of value.
- The Lord is the True Altar, and the True Priest who offered Himself as the True Lamb of God who bore away the sin of the world.
- The Altar that we have [Heb.13:10] is our treasure to which the Holy Spirit first led us, that we might understand “He made peace through the blood of His cross.”
- The Altar is where the Priest is and where the blood is that was shed for our sins. “He entered into heaven with His own blood.”
- The Altar is where truth is as a flowing well of water from which we draw the water of life that gives us our satisfaction and joy.

### **On the Altar**

- The Altar is the dying bed of the victim. By faith we see the Lamb of God on the cross of Calvary, being made a curse for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.
- The Altar is the place where “the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” That is where He bore our sins in His own body on the tree.
- The Altar is where the weight of the sins of an ungodly world, were laid on the innocent perfect Substitute that God Himself provided for us.
- Because of what happened at the Altar, God’s justice is satisfied and He blots out our sins for His own sake. In that way, no guilt or iniquity is found in those who have put their faith in Him.

### **At the Altar**

- Gifts and first fruits of worshippers are presented to the Lord at the Altar. The sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, and all the other acceptable sacrifices are presented to God at that Altar.
- Words and works are offered at the Altar by faith and through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for His sake. All we do for Him is sanctified by His blood and consecrated to His glory.
- The scent of what is offered to God and acceptable to God, is as a sweet-smelling savor, a soothing aroma unto our Lord. This is not mere smoke as it would be if it were the works of men. Adoration and praise to God make that which ascends to heaven, a fragrance of God’s grace bestowed to us here on earth

### **Because of the Altar**

- Acceptance by God is assured on the basis of the appropriate Altar, the right sacrifice, and the sincerity of worship on the part of those who offer the sacrifice.
- Those who worship the Father, must worship Him in spirit and in truth.
- Those who have been to the Altar are safe from the foes who pursue us to bring us down in shame, sin, and failure. Those who are at the Altar do not fear the demands of the law. No sword of justice falls on those who are at the Altar. Justice has already been satisfied because of the sacrifice Christ made there. At the Altar when our hearts are fixed on our Lord Jesus Christ, there is no enemy who can claim us or take away our security. There is no one whose rage against holiness and righteousness can harm us. “Our souls are in God’s mighty hand, we’re precious in His sight.”
- Those who have come to the Altar can here lay down every burden of sin, and every burden caused by sin.

- At the Altar we can present our bodies, “a living sacrifice” to God that is holy and acceptable to Him, as our reasonable service. Here our lives focus on the One to whom we are devoted, and whom our souls adore.
- At the Altar, I die to sin and am alive to God. We live to God and for God when we are continually at the Altar.
- Because of the Altar where we received a pardon for our sins, we are motivated to godliness because of our Lord Jesus Christ who is our all, for life, death, and eternity.

### **“The Lord smelled a sweet savor”**

#### **The Savor of Justice**

- Justice, by its claims, strikes terror into the hearts of human beings. It demands a lifetime of total obedience in thought, word, and deed.
- Justice demands payment for any and all evil that has been committed.
- Justice doesn’t overlook sin of whatever kind it is or size it is however obscure it may be or the degree of effect it may have or not have. Justice calls for just judgment on sin.
- Justice holds the scales on which iniquity is weighed. The rich and poor alike have to pay the price and bear the consequences of their own sin.
- Justice was satisfied when our Lord Jesus on the cross, took the cup of atonement that was needed and made atonement for our sins. That cup was so full that not a mite was left.
- Justice smells a sweet savor.

#### **The Savor of Truth**

- Truth is unyielding. It is either Yes or No. The word of truth speaks, and what it says is so.
- Truth speaks with authority and its words correspond directly with any action involved.
- Truth is eternal. It will not pass away even though heaven and earth may pass away.
- Truth declares wrath on sin, which cannot be paid for by pain, penance, or prayers.
- Truth would be untruth if sin escaped divine recompense and just retribution.
- Truth took every threat against it and put it on the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Person of Truth. “Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”
- Truth has not failed but has been kept in its entirety by our Lord Jesus Christ for our sake, and Truth smells a sweet savor from the sacrifice He made.

#### **The Savor of Holiness**

- Holiness is perfection and cannot look on sin but is repelled by sin and uncleanness.
- Holiness and unrighteousness cannot coexist in the same place.
- Holiness breathes purity, dignity, integrity, honesty, and righteousness.
- Holiness was accomplished for us when our Lord Jesus Christ “suffered, the just for the unjust to bring us to God.” “He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, would live unto righteousness.”
- Holiness smells a sweet savor because of an acceptable sacrifice.

#### **The Savor of Mercy**

- Mercy weeps over misery; is afflicted by afflictions.
- Mercy tastes the bitterness of sin, the anguish of the guilty, the fear of the perishing.
- Mercy loudly proclaimed its “Hosanna” when the triumphant word, “Finished!” sounded from the loud voice of the Savior on the cross. He knew all things were now accomplished.
- Mercy rejoices and smells the sweet savor of new life being granted without reservation to all those who call on the name of the Lord.

## **Review of Chapter 8**

- The Lord's Action – The Servant's Attitude (faith still intact)
- The Lord's Command – The Servant's Obedience
- The Servant's Consecration (the altar) – The Lord's Revelation (the promise)

**Review of the “days of Noah”** Luke 17:26. *“As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man.”*

### **Days of sin.**

- God's Way of living was abandoned by mankind
- God's Word was ignored when Noah preached
- God's Will was unheeded; no repentance took place

### **Days of sorrow.**

- God's Message was neglected
- God's Refuge was rejected
- God's Gift was refused

### **Days of salvation.**

- God's grace was working. Noah found grace.
- God's love was planning. Noah followed God's instructions, responded to His invitation, and lived by His protection.
- God's power was keeping power. The “keeping power of God” was what saved Noah and His family.

## **GENESIS 9**

### **A NEW ERA**

In Genesis chapter eight we read of the first step of faith Noah made into this new life beyond the flood. Noah answered God's call to come out of the ark, and “they went forth” into liberty, through grace, into a new creation. The first thing Noah did was build an altar for worship. Worship is our response to God, who in love, opened His heart to Noah as they were together at the altar. God has saved, does save, and will save all who come to Him by faith.

Chapter nine begins with another special blessing of this *new life* upon which Noah entered. Every new believer in Christ who appreciates being saved, and has become a *new creation* in Christ, becomes a worshipper and enters into a personal relationship with his or her Lord Jesus. “Be fruitful and multiply” are words from God to those who live by faith. We have died to the world by virtue of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. New life bears *new fruit* that increases the more we feed our souls with the word of God, and water our spirits when we meditate on what we read and hear from God.

There is also *new power* that was not there before the flood. It may have been that there was some other kind of connection between humans and animals before the flood. This new element in the new life was introduced in which animals began to fear humans. Protection from God was made so that even the strongest of beasts have an innate fear of people. God used them, and perhaps still does, to bring judgment, but in a general sense, animals can learn to be controlled or at least, to avoid, humans, even though we are weak and puny mortals.

The flesh of animals was given by permission from God, to help sustain mankind after the flood. Previously, man's food was only plants or from plants. Since the flood "every moving thing" as well as plants are sources of food for human beings. When we are given our new nature by the new birth, we have an abundance of spiritual food to nourish our souls and spirits that the people of the world system know nothing about. We can have our hunger satisfied by this new food from God. We can be clothed with coverings that last and protect us; we can derive strength from the meat which God says is ours for the taking.

God also gave man the authority to judge those who take the life of others. We have been formed in the image of God, by God, and it is a sin against Him personally when a person takes from another that life that God gave him or her. That which God has made to live, He will not allow to be taken away without equal consequences. Hate eats away at, and ultimately destroys a person from within them. The work of hateful flesh must be properly dealt with to preserve that which is from God.

A covenant was made between God and man relating to the creation God made in which he intends men to dwell, and the Creator Himself who has placed us in His creation. The rainbow is always in the clouds between heaven and earth, but it is only from time to time that we can see it from our place. That rainbow between the sun and water is always before God's eyes.

### **A New Start**

- Divine Blessing, v.1. *"God blessed Noah and his sons."*
- Divine Exhortation, v.1. *"Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth."*
- Divine Promise, v.2. Fear and dread of humans came on animals; that protected weak mankind
- Divine Provision, v.3. Food and sustenance were assured for human survival
- Divine Prohibition, v.4. Blood is not to be eaten as it is what symbolizes the life that God gives.
- Divine Warnings, v.6. The sanctity of life is to be preserved by equal punishment of those who take a person's life.
- Divine Expectations, v.7. Fruitfulness

### **A New Covenant**

- The Source of the Covenant, v.9. God
- The Scope of the Covenant, v.9-10. Every living creature
- The Purpose of the Covenant, v.11. Promise that life will not be cut off by a worldwide flood
- The Sign of the Covenant, v.12-13. Rainbow in the sky
- The Message of the Covenant, v.14-15. God is faithful
- The Duration of the Covenant, v.12, 16. Permanent
- The Guarantee of the Covenant, v.17. God's word

### **The Contents of the Covenant**

- God's mercy: No flood of water again in judgment on the whole earth
- God's power: The regular order of nature will not be changed
- God's faithfulness: Look ahead and up in faith
- God's grace: He will continually show undeserved favor that gives faith, hope and love to people

### **The Characteristics of the Covenant**

- Its naturalness: Nature expresses spiritual truth
- Its conspicuousness: Everyone can see the rainbow without difficulty
- Its universality: It can be seen everywhere on earth
- Its uniqueness: Its effects come from both storms and sunshine
- Its beauty: Its colors are exquisite expressions of grace in all its ways
- Its union: Earth and heaven affirm this covenant
- Its permanence: The rainbow is always there, always seen by God from above, but not always seen by humans below.

**THE RAINBOW** Gen.9:13. *I do set My bow in the cloud*”

When Noah came out of the ark, there would have been desolation as far as he could see in every direction. No signs of life were anywhere except the new growth of plants. Not a shred of evidence would have shown that people had ever lived on the earth. As he put his feet on the ground, he may have remembered it was over a year before when he had walked on solid ground. Perhaps when he lifted his eyes toward the sky and saw some dark clouds there, he would have wondered if rain was coming and would bring another flood. Through his years of life before the flood, the earth was watered with dew. The sound of rain falling on the roof of the ark may have still resonated in his memory.

**The God spoke**

*“I now establish My covenant with you...”*

*“Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood.”*

*“This is the sign of the covenant I make between Me and you.”*

*“I set My rainbow in the sky.”*

*“I will remember My covenant”*

*“I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant.”*

- God used the illustration of this covenant with Noah to reinforce the covenant He made with Israel during the days of Isaiah [Isa.54:7-10]. His “covenant of peace” was valid.
- God used the rainbow to calm Noah’s fears
- God’s work was simple but sublime. Sunshine from the opposite side of raindrops displays the beauty of color and forms an arch from our perspective like a roof over our heads.
- God’s skill and power are displayed openly. “Glory to God in the highest.”

**Faith looks beyond the rainbow**

- The beauty of the Lord is reflected in nature
- The light of the Lord is open to us all to see its variety
- The mercy of the Lord shows itself visibly in the rainbow
- The promise of the Lord in the rainbow strengthens our faith
- The joy of the Lord cheers us in dark times. The rainbow is seen at the beginning of the Bible and shines brightly again at the end as it circles the throne [Rev.4:3] and there is a rainbow on the head of the mighty angel [Rev.10:1].

**Lessons from the rainbow**

- In every storm of strife and opposition, the Sun of Righteousness is there
- In every terror of conscience, the sun is there above the clouds of darkness
- In every difficulty and perplexity, the light of the Sun is still able to make the rainbow to be seen by God from above

- In every dark curtain when peace is removed, the Sun of holy light still makes the colorful circle of promise shine, even though we may not see it at the moment
- In every cheerless day when hope seems to be gone, the sun still shines through the waters of testing, leaving the testimony of assurance that God is near
- Faith, when it lifts its head above circumstances, can see the brilliant colors of promise, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”
- Clear joy can be possessed when the perplexities and difficulties cloud our sky, but the promises are there and are secure. When God believes it is necessary, He lets us see the rainbow of promise to remind us that he never leaves or forsakes us.
- Look at the rainbow with faith in every trial and discouragement.
- Let the pledge that the Lord God made, assure, encourage and guide you to look upward and onward.
- Then let “the path of the just be as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

### **HUMAN NATURE/A BELIEVER’S FALL** Gen.9:18-29

**The Sons.** Noah’s three sons are described as the three divisions of the human race. Their actions affected others.

**The Sins.** Noah’s daily occupation was legitimate. There was nothing wrong with planting a vineyard, but in the normal occupations of life, there will be occasions to do wrong if we so choose. The sin of drunkenness has become prevalent throughout the whole world. The sin of immodesty follows in the footsteps of drunkenness. Intemperance and impurity are closely linked.

**The Shame.** To think that one who spent years walking with God, preaching righteousness, building the ark, and being in the ark with God for a whole year through the flood, and then failed in a simple thing, is both sad and shameful. Ham didn’t seem to be a grateful son who loved his father, nor did he have the decency that was in his brothers. Sin against the honor and respect of a father has a particularly bad connotation.

**The Sorrow.** Shem and Japheth, with love for their father and sorrow for his sin, took steps to cover his shame. With love and meekness knowing that such sins could happen to them, they would not look at his shame. Noah’s sorrow would have been great when he became aware of the dishonor, he brought on himself and the Lord. He would have been conscious of the sorrow it brought on himself, his son Ham, and his whole house.

**The Retribution.** A curse came on Canaan, Ham’s son because of the mockery of Noah he was likely aware of. What Ham saw Canaan must have known about. Ham sinned as a son and was punished as his own son.

**The reward.** Shem’s descendants were blessed in having Jehovah God to be their God. He chose that insignificant tribe of people to be a blessing to the whole world. The Gospel of Christ was first preached and began to spread through the descendants of Shem. The descendants of Japheth prospered materially and multiplied greatly. The spiritual blessing came through Shem. The material blessing came through Japheth and Ham was a servant to them.

### **Lessons.**

- A believer is never immune from sin. The evil principle of sin remains in us.
- A believer often finds small temptations the most dangerous. Little things may be the biggest test.
- A believer is liable to experience new temptations. New things arise against us to test our weaknesses.

- A believer may cause others to sin. Other people are affected by what we say and do.
- A believer will experience bitter suffering for sin. A shadow would have been on Noah's life for the rest of his days. "Whom the Lord loves, He chastens."
- A believer is conscious of God being impartial. Nothing is hidden from God. He has no favorites. "God is no respecter of persons."
- A believer does not have to fall into sin. Grace is greater than our sin or the sin principle that is in us. The Spirit of God indwells believers and still convicts us of sin.

## **GENESIS 10**

### **THE COURSE OF FAILURE**

It is possible for us to misuse our privileges and that will lead us to spiritual failure. Grace that has been shown toward us, and even grace in us, if misused, can make us forget ourselves and expose our spiritual weakness and nakedness. By failing to control our thoughts and the rule of our minds, if we give our minds the opportunity to show what is in us, we set ourselves up for failure.

Noah found grace and experienced the blessings of grace, but got side-tracked by his work. Shem represents the mind that loves contemplation and meditation, but that can be led astray if we allow ourselves to think and meditate on things that are wrong. Japheth speaks to us of those who are active in service and deeds and are successful. Those people can stumble if activities are linked to the wrong things. Materialism can quickly bring a person down spiritually in spite of their material success, or maybe because of it. Ham teaches of the results of knowing what is right and deliberately not doing it. Knowledge seeks to claim the place of authority in our lives, rather than living by faith, and it will soon lead to confusion.

All of these, even though grace has brought us into the blessings of the new birth, can bring failure in the lives of believers, and sometimes even evil can lift its ugly head in a Christian. "Self" still remains in us and if we start to glory in anything but the cross of Christ, we are bound to fail our Lord. Evil people have an eye out for evil in others to excuse the evil in themselves. Righteous people look for ways to engage in helping others to avoid evil as well as to avoid the contamination of evil in themselves.

Noah fell because of misusing the blessings he received. Ham's exposure to Noah's fall was because of the lack of love. Every test that Christians face, has a potential for failure, but it is also an opportunity for victory. A test can be an occasion for love and self-sacrificing grace to do their work of blessing for the benefit of others. Circumstances, and how we deal with them, prove what kind of person we are. The same trial that shows the carnality of the carnal, can show the grace of the gracious.

A consequence of evil is that evil follows evil. Noah misused blessings and exposed himself, and injured his character and reputation. Later, Nimrod, the grandson of Ham, exalted himself and sought to lord it over other people as if he was a god. Like many today, they want the gift of God, but they don't want God. Christ's rule, truth, and authority over us, is to make us free indeed. Man's rule places people under the bondage of men like themselves.

In assemblies of God's people, if we are careful and those who lead us commit themselves to following God's word, not the opinions of people, we can be preserved from the downward stages of departure. Nimrod "began to be a mighty one." Instead of being "examples to the flock," it is possible for some to seek to be "lords over God's heritage." The second downward step is to find and pay someone to do for the people what they should be doing themselves. We should all be doing what God has gifted us to do for the benefit of others. When faith in God and communion with Him fails, then we are in danger of wanting what God does instead of wanting God Himself. The third downward stage is confusion, as in "Babel." That leads to scattering what had been united. Then comes departure from the truth of God, and the rise of self-glory. That in turn leads to apostasy.

Building for the glory of man or the "success" of the local church leads to an imitation of what is true, instead of what is the truth of God. The longer the imitation is allowed to continue, the more divided people become. They begin to walk by sight, not by faith. The only remedy for such a result is the grace of God. The Holy Spirit can convict us of sin and move us to reject those downward steps when we repent and put our faith in the word of God alone for guidance. God Himself will guide us into all truth. Zeal for God, sanctification, and putting to death the sins of the flesh, will lead us forward to peace, joy, and satisfaction. The Shepherd and Bishop of our souls will be there to protect and guide us when we yield in true faith to Him. How wonderful the rediscovery of the unsearchable riches of Christ! In grace, He is always the same and receives all who come to Him in faith.

### **LESSONS TO LEARN FROM GENESIS 10**

**All nations are of one blood.** *"He hath made of one blood all nations of men" Acts 17:26.*

All men and all people are of one race and are of the same rank and with the same destiny. In the human sense, we are all relatives. So, it is impossible to really discern where missionary work begins and ends. There is much need in home missionary work and in missionary work abroad.

**All nations have one need.** The whole problem of sin is implied all the way through this account of the forming of nations. Common difficulties are everywhere in the world. Diseases are common to all people. All have sinned – there is no difference, so death has passed upon all men. Deep-seated sin cannot be eradicated by human efforts. That is the common lot of all people everywhere. Repentance is necessary for all people and faith in the living God is expected from everyone. The living God has revealed Himself in many ways, leaving people without an excuse for not believing in Him. All mankind has one and the same need. We all need forgiveness for our sins.

**All nations have one way of salvation.** God's mercy is extended to all the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah of the Jews, is the only Savior of all the sinners of the world.

## **GENESIS 11**

### **BABEL**

**Human life** had one language so that wherever people went until the time the descendants of Shem made a city and a tower, they could communicate with each other.

**Human sin** moved them to make a tower "whose top might reach to heaven." Pride and self-sufficiency were the motivation that ultimately led Babylon to be one of the worst centers of idolatry and religious falsehood on earth. Godless ambition moved people to say, "Let us make us a name" instead of submitting to divine authority. "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft."



**Divine consideration** took place when the “Lord looked *down* to see” what man had lifted up in his sinful ambition. God came *down* in judgment. God knows and deals with every action and attitude of man, having taken consideration of the motive and intention behind those actions and attitudes.

**Divine action** can quickly turn over and undo every prideful act that humans seek to do. Confusion is the result of human beings trying to control their own destiny without God.

- Life without God brings danger and disaster. Indifference soon becomes rebellion. A religious system that glorifies humanity and minimizes God, will lead to disaster upon all who follow that way. When religion leads people farther and farther away from God, they are in a place of danger where there will be trouble on every side.
- False unity brings danger and disaster. Outward, visible ties to seek to rally people together with nothing moral or spiritual in common will be fatal to true unity. Unity comes from what people share in common within themselves, not what they do outwardly. A church cannot maintain unity with mere outward forms. The unity of life, love, faith, spirit, service, and common interest, can be obtained and maintained in spite of differing personalities. When we belong to our Lord, He is the One common bond that keeps us together.
- True unity blesses God’s people. That comes because of being a living organism. In a very limited way, the organization of an organism enhances its functional abilities. God produces life and when spiritual life comes from God, there is unity in the body of Christ, by one Spirit who has called us to one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all.

## **GENESIS 12**

### **PATRIARCHAL HISTORY (3000+ years)**

The Bible begins with God dealing with the whole human race in seeking to bless them with His presence and fellowship. The first eleven chapters of Genesis cover the time period of about half of human history. Beginning in chapter twelve, attention is directed to one man of faith and his family. It was through that man and his progeny, the blessing of redemption for sin has been made plain to us. That would come through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and would become personal to those who put their personal faith in Him. The foundation was laid, and now the “building” is erected. The first eleven chapters of Genesis tell us how God’s original plan to bless human beings had been turned into a curse. The sin, failure, and moral corruption of humanity had become so universal, that all but Noah and his family were lost in the flood. Sadly, even that family failed because sin is in our human nature. Beginning in Gen.11:27, God begins to act in a different way to bring about His purpose to have lasting fellowship and communion with people.

Innocence in man in the Garden of Eden failed even though he was in the best of circumstances. The judgment of death passing on all men has kept us away from the way of the Tree of Life since then. Conscience as a guide to human conduct and to direct the moral and spiritual life of people failed to keep people from sin. The judgment of the flood took them all away except Noah and his family. Human government as the guiding force to direct human behavior failed when the decision was made to build a tower, to take over leadership from God. That resulted in the judgment of separation of people by segmenting them from each other by language barriers.

Therefore, God acted in another way to bring about His purpose to have mankind as willing participants in life with Him. Not far from where the tower of Babel was built, was Ur, a city of the Chaldeans. In that city lived Abram. His father was Terah, he had two brothers and his beautiful wife was Sarai. It is likely he was a shepherd although he had cattle and other kinds of livestock. He had

people serving him and was the actual leader of a considerable number of people. The beginning of Abram's story took place around four-hundred years after the flood, and idolatry had again permeated the society of Ur, and likely all other parts of the world.

How thankful we can be that in the dark times of ungodliness and worldly lusts, of war and unrest, of materialism and greed, there are people of faith in many parts of the world. The Lord has them there to shine as beacons of light in the darkness and to give hope to those who are afraid to live and afraid to die. The spirit of faith is real and obvious when there is a consciousness of the presence of God with them in the life of a child of God.

Abram was conscious of God, and the Lord told him to leave Ur, that idolatrous place, and go to a specific place. There God would bless him and the whole world through him and those in his family who would follow him. "By faith... he went out, not knowing whither he went... for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." [Heb.11]. He put his trust in God and in faith, obediently stepped into the unknown. God considered him righteous because he did this.

Like Abraham, we first trust the word of God and then believe that God's intentions toward us are true. Abram believed the amazing and incredible promise of God to him and obeyed God's command. Blessing has followed his obedience that has reached right to us because of Abram's faith. God promised he would make him into a great nation. He said He would personally bless Abram. He said He would make Abram's name great and he would be a blessing to others. God said He would bless the people who blessed him, and curse those who curse him and his seed. So, wise people do not speak evil of the Jews or raise their hand against Israel, because God doesn't go back on His promises. Finally, God said all the people of the world would be blessed through Abram and his seed. That has happened, is happening, and will happen because of the blessing of salvation that has come to "whosoever believes" in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

Out from the darkness of idolatry, came this man of faith, Abram, who is known worldwide as a man who believed God. Abraham (his other name), the "friend of God," was one of the noblest persons in history. Spiritually, he was God's chosen man to open our understanding of the plan and purpose of redemption.

### **THE BEGINNING OF THE HEBREW RACE.** Chapters 12-50

#### **Abraham, the father of the faithful.**

Key verse: Gen.15:6. "*And he believed in the Lord, and it was counted to him for righteousness.*" (See also: Rom.4:3,9,22; Gal.3:6)

***Abraham is with God, calls on the name of the Lord, and lives as a pilgrim.***

Chapters 12-14. Separation from the world to God. Abraham and the world.

Chapters 15-21. "After these things". His inner soul. Abraham and God.

Chapters 22-24. "After these things". God's blessings through Abraham.

- 22: Death and resurrection – a lamb.
- 23: Death of Sarah – Israel set aside.
- 24: Rebekah – calling out of the Church.

#### **Abraham's witness before men,** Gen.11-14.

**The Call given and accepted, chps.12-14**  
**The Covenant made and received, chps.15-16**  
**The Covenant confirmed, chps.17-21**  
**The Crowning event, chp.22**  
**The Closing years, chps.23-25**

**The Call of God.** [Gen.12:1; Heb.11:8]

This was God's third start with humanity. This time it is with a nation, not the whole human race.

Gen.12:1-3. What was involved in this act of faith? "God, I trust you completely. I will follow you to the ends of the earth if you want me to." God promised Abraham land, descendants, and blessings for all.

- Called to be a witness for God to the rest of humanity
- Called to have and reveal God's revelation of truth
- Called to prepare the way for the Savior of the world and the Messiah of the Jews
- Called to bless the world: God promises a land, a seed, a worldwide blessing

**Abram's Response.** He immediately acted on what God said. "Abraham believed God..." [Rom.4:3; Gal.3:6; Jas.2:23]

- The confidence of faith, v.4. He took God at His word without hesitating or questioning God
- The obedience of faith, v.4-6. Partial obedience at first; after the old man died, prompt obedience
- The influence of faith, v.5. Abram's faith led Lot to go to the place of blessing with him
- The confession of faith, v.6-7. Abram built an altar for prayer, worship, and a reminder of God's grace and promise
- The endurance of faith, v.8-9. He lived in tents for his lifetime; had to wait a long time for his seed although it was promised

**Lessons**

- A divine call: By faith we must take God at His word, trusting Him in dark times of testing
- A separating call: A divine claim. By faith, we separate from sin and those who practice sin. We separate from country, and any worldly tie, and separate unto God, to truth, to obedience, to God's grace.
- An assuring call: A divine consideration. By faith we worship, remember the promises of God, and surrender ourselves at the altar.
- An advantageous call: A divine cheer. God promises His presence, His power, His peace, and His promises for the future.
- A beneficial call: A divine consolation. I will show thee... I will make thee... I will bless thee
- A preserving call: A divine comfort. In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed
- An effectual call. "So, Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him. Gen.22. "Offer there thy son..." Heb. 11:17-19. In essence, he said, "Lord, take everything."

**Faith and unbelief: walking by faith.**

Gen.12:4-20. *The blessedness of faith.*

Contrast and compare with the believer today:

Abraham: "I will bless thee."

Canaan: "Cursed be Canaan.

Faith has its tests – famine.

1. Obedience of faith: sojourned; died in faith.
2. Path of faith: strangers (tent) and pilgrims (passed through).
3. Portion of faith: a city; a better country.
4. Response of faith: built an altar. He got beyond the land, city, and country to the Person.
5. Resource of faith: called upon the name of the Lord. Note: Gen.4:16,26; Mal.3:16 [godly in dark days]; Acts 9:21 [persecution]; 2Tim.2:22 [in the last days].
6. Faithlessness of Abraham: our weakness; down into Egypt; pitched no tent; raised no altar; no call to God.
7. Faithfulness of God: the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. God does not give up on His people when they break down. The Lord plagued Pharaoh. Abraham was sent away from Egypt (the world) in reproach and shame.

### **Testing Time**

New life in Christ doesn't mean we won't be tested from time to time. Some tests are not long in duration and other tests last for a lifetime. God gave Paul a "thorn in the flesh" to demonstrate divine strength through human weakness. True faith will be tested. The principle of defining faith in testing times, happened to Abram when there was a famine in the land God had promised him. Rather than stay there through the testing time of famine, Abram went down to Egypt to avoid the testing time of trusting God for survival and found the testing time of personal character.

- Special Circumstances, v.10. Anticipating a land rich in all the things he expected on earth, and not finding them, moved Abram to act on his own and go to Egypt. We will find our expectations will get focused on things we see, rather than things we don't see if we neglect God's word.
- A Long Journey, v.10. It seemed natural to Abram to leave the dry land of Canaan which depended on rain from God, to go to Egypt where irrigation brought water from earth (The Nile River) to make plants grow. When we become occupied with the life around us and the things of the world, we lose sight of God and things which are above and last forever.
- A Self-Centered Proposal, v.11-13. A half-truth is a lie when its purpose is deception. With his mind off God and on his own self-preservation, Abram was concerned for only his own safety and self-interests, not for Sarai's nor for God's. Great people can become small, and strong people can become weak. Good people can become bad when we leave God out of our lives and plans.
- The Result, v.14-16. What Abram feared, happened. His precaution opened the way for Pharaoh to take Sarai into his hareem. Abram's life was saved, he was showered with material goods – and he was left alone in his tent with a bad conscience and the pain of guilt. He got what he wanted except he didn't have Sarai, he didn't have a friendship with God, and he didn't even have good thoughts about himself. His strongest point was also his weakest.
- God's Displeasure, v.17. Unbelievers felt the wrath of God on account of Abram's failure. We have the obligation to be truthful, and people of integrity toward those who don't know the Lord. God could not allow His promises to fail or His will to be left undone. Abram had to be rescued from himself and Sarai had to be rescued from the place of evil.
- The Rebuke, v.18-20. Pharaoh, with all of his sins, abhorred lying. No wonder he was angry when Abram's deception was found out. Lying and deception are not characteristics of people of faith. Unbelievers expect better of us than they do of themselves, and so they should.
- The Restoration, Gen.13:1-4. Abram left Egypt under duress but it was God who allowed an idolater to rebuke and reject the man of faith. No altar or prayer was in Egypt. True surrender

and simple worship are able to be made in the place of God's choosing, not of our choice. Repentance for a believer's falsehood is the first step toward restoration. Backsliding leads to bad experiences. Trust and truth are our safeguards. Trust in God in every situation is the essence of faith - simple, absolute, continual trust. Truth is what we seek, but it is also the means we must use when making decisions.

## **GENESIS 13**

### **SEPARATION**

There is a difference between a spiritual mind and an upright natural mind. For some time, we may hardly be conscious of the distinction when people live similar lives of honesty and uprightness. They may act in similar ways in the normal course of life and their ways of speaking may be even more or less the same. As time passes and experiences in life affect a person's health, well-being, or financial status, gradually differences are seen that demonstrate the outward actions and the inward convictions of each person. A separateness develops that is distinct as time passes. The separateness becomes so obvious and the verdict comes to light so clearly, that the time has arrived to "come out from among them and be ye separate says the Lord."

God knew all along the distinction, but we have to be convinced ourselves to stop the temptation to be unequally yoked to another person, religion, church group, or political affiliation. Abram walked with God, but Lot walked only with Abram. Lot was able to maintain for quite a long time the same manner of life as Abram. From Haran to Canaan, from Canaan to Egypt, from Egypt to the Negev, and from the Negev back to Bethel, Lot walked along with Abram. He had prospered by being with Abram and he knew that was the reason. When we get to the high ground where the altar is and where sacrifices are made, that exposes the difference between a righteous natural man and a man of faith in God. On the high ground, the earth is watered by God. That is in great contrast to the well-irrigated plains of Jordan.

Events in life bring out the hidden things of the heart. Abram had returned in faith to where he got off track and left for Egypt. When he was awakened by the rebuke of an unbelieving idolater, he returned to the place where he could get back in fellowship with God. Lot came back with him too because he had "hitched his wagon" to Abram. He had not been linked in faith to God. In faith, we may labor to bring that which is of natural righteousness into unity with that which is spiritual, but it won't work. We may think that which is outwardly good, springs from that which is righteous within, hoping there is a spiritual tie. But God who knows the heart of every person, and who is longsuffering, shows the spiritual person what is real and what is missing.

Abram left Egypt with his material prosperity increased and Lot also came back with his own material prosperity increased. Abram knew he had to get back to the altar he left. Lot came with him to be able to pick up where he had left off. He had herds, flocks, and tents in abundance. Abram had that too, but he was also "rich in silver and gold." The outward evidence of blessings from God may be similar between two people, but the inward forms of truth relating to God, redemption, and divine life are where lasting blessings lie and where there is real spiritual life.

Living on the high ground has its difficulties at times, and people of true faith experience some of the heartbreak of loss and the pain of serious events the same as other people. But they know God is there,

and by His grace and power, they stay the course with Him while others turn to a different course in life. Those whose outward life is upright is the controlling factor of their lives, sooner or later will find it impossible to continue to walk with people of faith. It is then they gradually or quickly, resolutely press forward on their own to “do their own thing.” Without an “Abram” to walk with, and without faith and a spiritual mind and heart, they go to the “well-watered plains of Jordan,” to find what they think they have been missing, deprived of, or “brain-washed” to accept as truth.

Separation does not change the fact that we have some things in common because of our background or the “ties of nature.” When we must choose to walk by faith or by sight, all that Egypt has to offer, and what we got from being in the world system, wins over the heart of the natural man. The great blessings of grace, and the simple demands of grace and living by faith, lose their attraction. The restlessness of the world and the flesh motivated by the devil, lead the “Lots” of this world to go toward Sodom.

The path of faith on which believers remain may seem quite lonely for a while, as we watch the backs of those who were near and dear to us get smaller and smaller as they walk downhill and get closer and closer to Sodom. Those who separate because they want to walk by sight, soon begin to walk by self-will away from the light of the word of God, and ignore the truth and the life it gives us. Before long what they first saw and then chose, becomes their dwelling place. They make their new home in the world and are separated from God and His people.

What are the people who live by faith to do? We cannot change the choices of those who do not walk in the Spirit and choose to ignore the teaching of divine truth in the scriptures. Our only action is to “lift up” our eyes and look to Him who is eternally unchanging. He bids us look into the distance in every direction and see all that we have in Christ now, as well as what the future holds. We will do what we can for “Lot” without interfering with the choice he made.

Abram was first promised land that God would “show” him. When he got there, God promised to “give it” to him and his seed forever. He was told to walk through it so he could see for himself, and in a measure, experience what the future held because he believed in God and could see by faith, the value of what he was given.

To follow the Lord and live by faith may have some high costs, like the loss of friendships, family joys, and fellowship. The other side of separation makes us look forward and far ahead into the future of our existence. It is there and then those who live by faith receive “a hundred-fold.” It is then “The trials of the road will seem nothing when we get to the end of the way.” Believers need to “Fix your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.”

### **REFUSING AND CHOOSING**

Gen.13. *Renouncing the world.*

The choice of the flesh: dwelled in the cities; toward Sodom.

The confession of faith: walk through the land.

1. v.1-4. Recovery from failure; went up out of the land of Egypt. Abraham retraces his steps until he is a stranger and pilgrim with his tent, a worshiper with an altar, and a dependent man calling upon the name of the Lord.

2. Result of failure: Lot went with him [12:4; 13:1; 13:5]. He was in the right position without personal exercise and faith in God.
3. v.5-9. Riches are a snare, “All their substance” [12:5]. “He was very rich” [13:2, 5-9]. Division and strife result.
4. v.8. Position of faith, “No strife.” Reveals Abraham’s heavenly-mindedness; reveals Lot’s worldly-mindedness.
5. v.10-13. Choice of the flesh: Lot leaves Canaan forever.
6. v.14. Confession of faith: “Lift up thine eyes.”

### **INSIGHTS INTO REAL LIFE**

**A Serious Problem, v.5-6.** This is the first mention of riches in the Bible, and sure enough, riches bring problems. There is no sin in being wealthy, but wealth increases the responsibility of believers. If riches are not used properly with a sense of stewardship from the Lord, but of personal ownership, they can soon lead a person into sin. Riches can lead to family quarrels and even conflict with the governments as well as with other people.

**A Deplorable Strife, v.7.** People moved by human nature, will always endeavor to gain the best for themselves, even though they may be upright and generous in many ways. Those around us often look for and are secretly glad, when there is strife between Christians. Pointing fingers of accusations against Christians has become a choice way to excuse personal sin.

**A Generous Proposal, v.8-9.** Faith takes the initiative in solving problems. To suffer loss and give benefit and favor to others, may seem to be foolish at the moment. People of faith take a long view of things and events. Abram had recovered from his fall in Egypt and was now back to where he had received the promises of God, and enjoyed fellowship with God. He could well afford to be magnanimous because he was a friend of God with all the resources he needed were provided for by God.

**A Selfish Choice, v.10-13.** Lot took Abram at his word and made his choice for what he thought was to his advantage. We all make decisions and if we are not careful, some are made without careful thought of the consequences of the decision. “What will be the moral results to my family if I do this?” “What’s wrong with allowing my children to do what the children of other people do? After all, they have got to learn how to deal with the sinful world the way it is.” Material, social and financial gains are not good reasons to choose them above commitment to a church, the Gospel, and the blessing of other people. Some mistakes in decision-making affect my family, my life and testimony, and perhaps other people for generations.

**A Divine Revelation, v.14-17.** Being alone after separations take place, may at first make us wonder if we made the right decision. In our solitude, we are inclined to lift up our eyes and see things from God’s perspective.

- God gives us a whole new prospect
- God gives us a wonderful promise
- God grants us a great possession

### **At the Altar.**

- We see differences *in* believers. We can discern the contrast of living by faith or by sight; of living for God’s interest or self-interests; of having whole-hearted faith and obedience or earthly ambitions.
- We see differences *between* believers. We will have differences of opinion at times. Instead of insisting on others agreeing with me, I should in faith “esteem others” better than myself.

- We see differences *for* believers. We may get what we want from earthly prosperity, but happiness and fellowship with God will be forfeited. When we put God first, in His own time and way, He increases our spiritual desires and spiritual blessings.

## **GENESIS 14**

### **CONFLICTS**

In much of the ancient world in which Abram lived, people lived under the authority and guidance of leaders of city/states. In this chapter, there are nine that are named. Four of them come from Shem's seed and five are from Ham. Even before Lot left Abram to move to Sodom, kings from Shem's lineage had been in conflict with the giants and other tribes in Ham's line. The world in which we live has been in constant conflict because of the sinfulness of human nature. Sinners can't help sinning and sin always brings conflict. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

The dark rebellious-minded powers had been overcome by those of a more reasonable bent even though they were fallen and debased themselves. For twelve years there was an unsettled calm until another branch of Ham's descendants, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, rebelled and were overcome by those who were more controlled and steadier. There will always be a certain degree of controversy between those who are atheistic and/or agnostic in their beliefs and those who are religious, even though their "religion" may only be a form. The Babylonian religion of the world system is very strong in our day, although many people in Western world countries have turned away from Christianity as a religion. Those who believe in the gods of their religion can often overcome those whose god is only themselves. Religionists can become fanatics who are willing to die for what they believe because they have hope for a better future. Those who believe in themselves are generally fatalists who just live for the present and die without any hope for the future.

Like Abram in the high place among the beauties of the trees, and separated unto God, people who put their faith in God alone, remain out of the wars going on in the valleys below where "There is no peace saith my God to the wicked." There are some things we are not to get involved in. The conflicts of the world system, whether political, social, or religious, are things we should stay away from. How difficult and daunting it must have been for a "just man" like Lot, who knew what was right but chose what was wrong, to have lived in Sodom! His spirit was "vexed from day to day" but he still remained in the valley of conflict, and dwelt in the hotbed of it all – Sodom.

The teaching of the world system is that believers should not be separated from the controversies that continually afflict people and nations. Pilgrims are wanted from both sides of conflicts, to support those who lead those conflicts. Abram never joined either side: Shem's descendants, who were the religious people, or the ungodly people of Sodom who were irreligious. He had prepared himself and his people to defend what was his, in the same way, believers today should be constantly learning what we know to be true from the word of God. We should know how to defend what is right, and how to seek the lost who are living without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world.

It is no small matter when something so serious arises that we can't avoid getting involved. There are obvious and potential dangers, but "If a brother be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness (power under control), considering thyself lest thou also be



tempted.” Abram didn’t join with either the religious or irreligious. He remained separate but did what he did “as to the Lord” and went with his own trained men under the guidance and strength of the Lord to deliver Lot.

The result was, Lot was freed by Abram and his three-hundred eighteen trained men. Through the pilgrim, the Lord brought deliverance to the captives. That principle and practice remain today for us. God uses those who are ready to serve Him, not the world, and through the power of His Gospel, souls are delivered from the chains that bind them and God sets them free in Christ. The pilgrim was the one who could truly help his brother who was helpless to save himself then, and it is the same today.

Even though there was a failure on the part of Lot, Abram could not ignore the need of his brother in the flesh who had deliberately associated himself with “them that know not God.” God vindicated His own servant who was the needed helper in time of need. When we go in the power of the Spirit of God to do the work of God in delivering souls from the bondage of sin, it is our responsibility to do what God tells us in His word to do, and it is God who delivers and saves the lost souls.

At the triumphant return of Abram and his private armed force, two different kings came out to meet him. The king of Sodom must have avoided capture by running away during the battle. That is the way of the world. As long as you conform to it and the way it wants, you will be all right – until the crunch comes. Then you are left on your own. Lot and his family were not part of the conflict, but because of where they lived and what Lot had chosen, they were captives because of the conflict. If a believer has not separated himself or herself from the world, even though they may not be involved in all the ungodly people do, they will still not be untouched by the events in which unbelievers are engaged. They will suffer because they were in the wrong place by their own choice.

When people of faith are tempted, we must remember to whom we belong and resolve to “not touch” the unclean things of the world, even when they are freely offered. A thread or a shoe-lace isn’t much, but when it comes from the favor of those who are wicked, those small strings are attached to the “appearance of evil.” Those who are rulers of darkness may seek a means to trap a person of faith in God into some form of compromise. The results of that subtle conflict may not be known for quite a while, but to take anything from the unclean fruits of wickedness is to invite trouble in the future.

The king of Salem (peace), Melchizedek (king of righteousness), was an unknown believer in the Most-High God. There are believers in many parts of the world whom we will never know about, but who are God’s chosen people placed where He wants them, to do what He wants them to do. What a joy it will be to meet those unknown people of faith in God in the future! We are not told of his pedigree, his history, or any of his exploits, but it is enough to know that he brought “bread to strengthen and wine to cheer.” Men of faith, after conflict, may be faint. Especially if the rulers of darkness come out to meet them and praise them. The blessing of Melchizedek, the king/priest was gladly received. He knew who had won the battle. He knew God. “The Most-High God, who delivered your enemies into your hand,” was the One who brought victory.

Abram refused to be enriched by Sodom, but he was a giver when he had the opportunity, to one who represented “The Most-High God Possessor of heaven and earth.” After the conflict and the victory, Abram gave God, through Melchizedek, that which belonged to Him. When God’s people are true to God according to how God prospered them, their glory is not in themselves and their gifts, but their

glory is in the cross of Christ. Conflict concluded under the divine deliverance of God, is a cause for rejoicing, responsibility, and remembering the One who delivered us.

### **EMERGENCY**

**The Battle.** The whole world is seen as a place of conflict and emergency measures are always needed. In the battles of evil people against each other, those who belong to Christ need to remember where our citizenship is and not become entangled in the deeds of the darkness of this age.

**The Capture.** Lot only lived for the moment and for immediate advantage. To be near what was wrong was not enough for him. He wanted to live where he could be a part of the action, although he was not a participant in all of the evil practices.

**The Bold Action.** Abram was a brave, thoughtful man who knew the value of being skilled himself, and of training those who followed him so they would be ready for any contingency. He pursued those who took Lot. He had a strategy he followed and with his skillful leadership under divine control, he rescued Lot. Strangely, there is no record of Lot even expressing appreciation.

**The Brave Man.** A *godly man* living a godly life is a man God can use. He had sympathy for those who were lost as he went to rescue the perishing. He made a decision to act with courage, initiative, and trust in God. He had taken the time and thought, to prepare himself to be capable of doing what needed to be done. A *faithful man* living before the Lord, and in contact with God, is a man God can use. He had experienced the grace of God himself when he was astray. He knew the power of God and the wonders of God and was stirred into action. Faith purifies our lives, instructs our minds, softens our hearts, stirs our actions, strengthens our resolve, and controls our will. “Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.”

### **THE KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Melchizedek’s name in its absolute fullness is only found in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is “A king forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Those who have been separated unto our Lord, have been made righteous by His righteousness. Zion (heavenly Jerusalem) is the home to which we are traveling. The new life in Christ comes from the living seed of the word of God taking root in the souls of repentant sinners and it leads them to put faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

- There is peace with those who are inhabitants of Zion who are on their way home.
- There is peace with heaven where holiness makes us accepted in the Beloved.
- There is peace within those who have been delivered from sin by the Redeemer
- There is peace because the Prince of Peace has been to the altar. He is the altar and He is the Lamb of God who gave His life on the altar of sacrifice at the cross.
- There is peace when weary warriors can stop and partake of bread and wine in the presence of the King of Righteousness.
- There is peace when we are able to give from our hearts that which God has given us, and belongs to Him in the first place.

Success and adversity are both good tests of character. How a person conducts themselves when a victory has taken place in their life, reveals their inner character and spiritual power. “To God be all the glory,” is an important phrase to remember whenever He chooses to bless us through adversity or success. When Abram returned with Lot and all the things that had been taken from Sodom, the king of Sodom naturally came out to express his gratitude for what Abram had done. There was another king who had come out to meet Abram before him, the king of Salem.

**Royal Recognition**, v.17-18. There was a striking contrast in the attitude of Abram toward those two kings. To the king of Sodom, he asserted his independence from him entirely. To the king of Salem, he acknowledged his dependence on the Most-High God of whom the king/priest was His representative. To the king of Sodom, he was an equal. To the king of Salem, he admitted his inferiority. To the king of Sodom, Abram had the attitude of dignity. To the king of Salem, he showed the spirit of humility.

The reason for the obvious difference was faith. Faith recognizes a spiritual person. Melchizedek was God's representative and Abram quickly discerned that fact. Faith also recognizes spiritual peril. The temptation to be made rich in this world's goods is often the result of success and victory. Faith is able to resist the pressure to be exalted by sinful people. Faith rests on the fact that if "In all our ways," we acknowledge God is in control, "He will direct [our] paths."

**Priestly Blessing**, v.18-20. Priesthood gives a person access to the presence of God on behalf of others as their representative. That is what we do when we go to the "throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Melchizedek blessed Abram and prayed for God's blessing on him. He also blessed God for His deliverance on behalf of Abram. God blesses us by taking *action* on our behalf. We are able to bless God with our *words*.

**Abram's Acknowledgement**, v.20. He was willing to receive the blessing Melchizedek offered, conscious of the power and position of the king/priest. He acknowledged the authority of Melchizedek, by giving a tithe of all he had. God has that absolute right to what He has given us, and when spontaneous gifts are given by those who are redeemed and grateful, God accepts that as a sweet-smelling savor to Him.

**Natural Proposition**, v.21. The king of Sodom acknowledged his indebtedness to Abram and it was his obvious intent to show his gratitude by having Abram keep all the goods he recovered. What he really wanted for himself was the people over whom he would rule. Abram was guided by divine and spiritual principles to not take the smallest thing. His desires were not natural but spiritual.

**Abram's Refusal**, v.22-24. He would not take the smallest gift that would compromise his testimony and integrity. "That which is of the earth is earthy." Lot is an example of the spiritual, moral, and personal dangers of cooperation with this ungodly world.

## **VICTORY AND DEFEAT.**

Gen.14. *Conflicts of the world.*

1. v.1-11. Conflict: Present evil world.
2. v.12. Capture: took Lot.
3. v.13-16. Contrast: Abraham renounced the world and is victorious over it. The man of faith [v.13-16]; two kings [v.17-18].
4. v.17-24. Compensation: Abraham rises above its enmity and doesn't fall beneath its kindness. Faith knows all conflicts of the earth between nations and individuals as well as the conflicts within an individual. With Christ reigning supreme in one's life, that person can gain a victory over what appears to be a defeat or without yielding to temptation.

## **GENESIS 15**

### **THE COVENANT**

A life-changing spiritual reaction to some eventful experience is quite common to people of faith. It is like we awake to the fact that God is not done with us even if we fail. He gave Abram a significant victory and then presented him with two kings who met him on his way home. The first one was

Melchizedek, king of Salem who represented the kingdom of God and the fellowship with God and His people we find in that kingdom. The other was the king of Sodom who represented the world and all it has to offer. Abram gladly accepted what the king of Salem offered and gave to him what he owed to God, while on the other hand, he wisely rejected everything he was offered by the king of Sodom. Separation from the world and the sin-stained things the world produces is the only way we can keep “unspotted by the world.”

The forming of God’s covenant follows the rescue of Lot and opens another whole new experience of faith in the life of Abram. This is the fifth time Abram had a manifestation of God’s presence. The phrase, “After these things,” indicates Abram had moved farther and higher in his life of faith. God reveals Himself to us when our need is great. After the victory, Abram watched Lot go right back to Sodom. What a letdown! Physical, mental, and even moral reactions may come soon after and period of stress and strain. Fear before a battle is normal because of our lack of confidence in ourselves, and fear of the outcome as well as cowardice. Fear, after the battle is over, is the mark of a brave person who is fully aware of what could have happened if God hadn’t intervened.

**Divine Revelation**, v.1. *“Fear not, Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”* God is our shield from all enemies and their opposition. He is also our reward when the battle is over. He does not allow His faithful servants to be losers.

**Human Response**, v.2-3. *“Lord God, what will You give me...?”* Waiting and longing for God’s promise of a son, had left Abram despondent and disappointed. He had been ten years in Canaan and was getting older, still there was no sign of the fulfillment of a promised heir, and he was thinking about taking matters into his own hands. It is well for us to always remember God acts on His own agenda, not on our timetable.

**Divine Assurance**, v.4-5. *“A son coming from your own body will be your heir.”* God gently corrects Abram’s lack of faith and in grace, assures him that He will keep His promise. When God instructs us by His word, the manner in which He fulfills His promise is not the issue. Rather, it is the fact that He is giving us further reason to trust Him alone.

**Human Acceptance**, *“And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”* In the Old Testament, people in general were conscious of righteousness being a fundamental attribute of God. It was a reference to the rightness of the actions of God; God is always right and consistent with His own nature and character. In His dealings with us, He is not partial, deceptive, crooked, or contradictory. He doesn’t favor the wicked because they are rich, nor does he justify the poor and afflicted because they are poor and afflicted. God’s judgments are always righteous.

God does expect those who belong to Him to be righteous and do what is right. Abram was righteous through faith, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and He saw it and was glad.” He looked forward by faith to the cross. We look backward to the cross-work of our Lord Jesus Christ by faith and understanding and trust in God’s grace. We are able by the Holy Spirit in us, to behave righteously in the sight of God. That is what He expects of us. Redemption has brought us the ability to do what God wants in our daily life as well as every aspect of life. Righteous people live a life of sanctification in which we act more like our Lord because of His righteousness that has been passed on to us.

It is possible for us to become spiritually despondent right after a spiritual victory. Our weak humanity can quickly succumb to the temptation to sit down and stop doing what God wants. That in turn, will lead to spiritual disheartenment. By being despondent and allowing spiritual depression to continue,

we can easily bring discredit to the name of God. We need protection against spiritual discouragement. This is found as God continually reveals Himself to our minds and hearts through His word and fellowship with Him in prayer. God's truth deserves our whole-hearted trust. His grace and our faith can overcome discouragement. Spiritual discipline brings us closer to God and to where we depend on Him rather than on the gifts, He gives us. He is the foundation of our faith, our source of spiritual life, power, progress, and joy.

### **BLESSINGS CAN ALSO BE TRIALS**

- **The promises of God are tests of our faith.** Grief often comes before joy. Excitement may soon be followed by drudgery. Fruit follows extensive labor. As faith progress, it wants to see the "promised land." We become strong in faith by the trials through which we are called to pass. Faith leads us to worship God Himself, not because of the blessings He grants us.
- **The promises are believed, but faith doesn't know how they will come.** Our faith is in the Person who gives the promises, not the words of the promise. A promise is only as reliable as the person who gives it. By faith, we believe God means what He says. How He chooses to fulfill the promises He gives, and when that will be, is up to Him.
- **The promises of God, and our promise to Him, are the basis of a covenant.** Faith worships and faith takes action in worship. Abram divided the animals in half and opened the birds with their wings wide. The innermost substance of the sacrifices needed to form the covenant needed to be exposed to the view of both who were involved in making the covenant. Nothing was held back. Normally in a covenant between people, both parties would walk between the two halves. In this case, in the dreadful darkness, it was the fire of God only that passed through making the trial of darkness become an hour of light. Earthly things were shut out in the darkness while heavenly things were revealed.
- **The promises of God may not be fully understood, but they are real.** The trial of Abram ended in the light of the covenant, and the faith of Abram was revealed as never before. Faith believes and righteousness results, but when we worship God Himself, His promises become larger than we had ever imagined. So, faith that is anxious, can be faith that quietly rests, knowing that what God says, He will do.

### **"I am your shield".** Gen.15:1

In any ancient battle, a shield was as important as a sword. A shield is a piece of armor designed for defense, and by movement can stop the arrows and darts of the enemies. When one is behind the shield, there is safety. The "shield of faith" is one part of a believer's spiritual armor he is to take on to protect him from the "fiery darts" of the wicked. When a person is a shield, that means that whatever was intended against you, is focused on another who is in front of you – who has taken your place.

**God Himself is our Shield.** In the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, He has positioned Himself between us and our enemies. Holy justice has the right to bring us down because of our sins and failures, but it fell on our Lord Jesus instead of us. Satan casts his darts of deception, lies, animosity, and outright hatred of righteousness and truth, but our Lord took every one upon Himself. The wages of our sin bring the dart of the fear of death and death itself, but our "Shield" died for our sins according to the scriptures, when He "died for the ungodly." None of those darts and arrows of challenge against us gets past the One who is our Shield in front of us.

- Sin is an enemy over which we have no control or power in ourselves, and death is the result of sin. How thankful we are that "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin."

- Satan is an enemy whose evil strength seeks to take us to hell. The shield of faith given to us, along with the Shield in front of us, gives us the ability to resist the devil and he will flee from us. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”
- Self is an awful enemy that is at us constantly without letup. The Shield enables us to reject ‘the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life’ as well as the world, the flesh, and the devil.
- Success and pleasure are enemies that promise much and produce little that lasts for eternity. Both of these are never satisfied. They have a tendency to beat us down and we may fall under the onslaught of their futility.
- Scorn and sarcasm are enemies that may come unexpectedly, but “greater is he that is in you, that he that is in the world.”
- Sadness and sorrow are twin enemies that often attack when we least expect them. The Shield before us bids us to “Look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

**‘Your exceeding great reward.’ Gen.15:1**

- Abram first heard God’s call of reward when he was in Ur of the Chaldees when he was in the middle of an idolatrous city.
- Abram heard God speak to him when the temptation was put before him to take riches from the king of Sodom, but instead, he turned away from that with a holy indifference.
- There is a narrow gate and a narrow way open before those who can see beyond the treasures of the broad way, which leads to the place where we lay up treasures in heaven.
- To enter through that open door, means that we move in spirit to where we are willing to enter by faith in God’s word. It is then we put our faith in Christ alone for salvation. Then we walk and live by faith, not by sight.
- The love of this world and the emptiness of all it offers, fades when we look to the One who is our “Exceeding Great Reward.” Our treasure is Christ Himself. He is our present reward, our great reward, our eternal reward. He is God, and He is the Man who paid the price we needed to pay to be righteous before the holy God. We have been bought with the precious blood of Christ.
- The present advocacy of our Lord Jesus Christ is an exceeding great reward. Because He lives, we shall live also. “Our life is hidden with Christ in God.”
- The promise of His return is an exceeding great reward. When Christ is established in our hearts today, this is an exceeding great reward that we already have and will have forever.

**CONFIRMATION OF FAITH**

The verses in this chapter from seventeen to twenty-one give us a view of how we should respond to, reverence, and respect God in our communication with Him. It is no casual matter to be speaking to and interacting with, the Almighty God. True, He is our Father, but not in the same way as our earthly fathers. God’s response to the faith Abram had in Him, was to enter into covenant with him. This would assure Abram and those of his seed after him, of all of God’s promises being fulfilled.

**The Foundation of the Covenant,** v.7. God’s character and God’s presence never change. He is always the same and always will be. He had redeemed Abram and called him to go where he directed. God had preserved him through famine and failure when his faith became weak. He had used Abram to rescue Lot when he delivered the enemy into the hands of Abram and his servants. Then God

renewed the promise of the land of Canaan to him, and His objective of blessing the world through the man who “believed in the Lord.”

**The Desire for the Covenant**, v.8. Abram wanted proof, and appealed to God for knowledge and assurance. He wanted some visible evidence and a pledge. He didn’t need this to believe, but after he believed he wanted confirmation as to how and when the promise would be fulfilled. He was like the man who came to the Lord Jesus and said, “Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief.” How kind it was of God to be willing to enter into this covenant with His friend!

**The Preparation for the Covenant**, v.9-16. The instructions from God were plain. Abram’s part in the covenant was to provide the requirements connected to solemnly establishing the terms of the covenant. It was his responsibility to do what God said so that a pathway between the parts of animals and birds would be made. In covenants between people, both participants would walk that path to ratify their agreement.

**The Readiness for the Covenant**, v.11-12. Abram was faithful to God and obeyed the command of God exactly as he had been instructed. This is the attitude and the way every believer should act in order to progress and develop as a person of faith. Obeying God, and waiting and watching for God to fulfill His promise is our part as participants in the new covenant we have with our Lord. A spiritual attitude is the underlying necessity to keep our part of the covenant with God. The dreadful darkness was God’s way of detaching Abram from anything that would divert his attention from the presence of God. Darkness around us makes us more conscious of the presence of God with us.

**The Message of the Covenant**, v.13-16.

- His seed will go into exile and be in bondage and affliction
- His seed will witness the power of God
- He would find peace in his old age
- He was to be patient because God was working out His will

**The Making of the Covenant**, v.17-21. The firepot and flaming torch symbolized the presence of God passing between the halves of the animals, and the birds, which was evidence that this was not an agreement between equals. This was a *Divine Action* as God ratified His promise to Abram. God promises, God gives and God assures. This was a prelude to a description of God’s promise of the land to His friend, the man of faith. God gave what Abram wanted and his *Human Attitude* was obvious with a feeling of gratitude, a response of complete trust, an expression of thanksgiving, and a life of obedience.

**Sonship and inheritance.**

Gen.15.

1. v.1. Revelation of God: “in a vision.”
2. v.2-3. Response of faith: “I am ... reward.”
3. v.4. Reward of grace: “He shall come forth.”
4. v.5-7. Reckoning of righteousness: “Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness [Rom.4]. Look, listen, believe.
5. v.8-10. Remission of sins: Sacrifice.

## **GENESIS 16**

### **THERE’S A TIME TO WAIT**

We don’t always learn from our mistakes. When we have to relearn the same lessons, the consequences are usually more severe and longer lasting. Abram knew he had taken action without faith or even asking God for guidance when he went to Egypt. Now, he was well along in his eighties,

but even as an older man, instead of asking if Sarai's suggestion to have the long-awaited son through a surrogate mother was what God intended, he acted on his own initiative. "Abram heeded the voice of Sarai." For lack of patience and spiritual discernment, he stepped into a snare with far-reaching effects.

**The Sad Mistake.** Waiting is not easy. There is often the temptation to take matters into our own hands when things are not happening the way we thought they should or according to our timetable. It is true that the temptation came from Sarai, but Abram did not have to yield to that temptation. Perhaps she did not know the promised seed would come through her. She did know it was coming through her husband. She had faith in God's promise and seemed willing to deny herself the privilege of having a child to see that promise come true. Her motive was likely genuine and self-sacrificing, but the proposal was wrong and the method was wrong. It was wrong against God who was waiting until Abram's faith was completely in Him. It wronged both Hagar and Sarai.

**The Sad Results.** Hagar became insolent, although that was natural and inevitable since she had almost become like a second wife to Abram. Human nature doesn't stop being human nature, and home conflict was a result. Sarai blamed Abram for the injury to her pride and self-esteem. Misery was another result that came on Abram because of the conflict and he was powerless to avoid it. Hagar was Sarai's servant/slave and so was her property to do with as she chose! Injustice against Hagar was another result because she was treated worse than before she bore Ishmael for Abram. These are lessons for us to consider before we take questionable steps. "Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin." Payday comes someday!

**The Glad Intervention.** Man blunders and fails, sins, and suffers. God sees the conditions we bring upon ourselves, and in wonderful grace, overrules them with grace and divine providence. God found Hagar overwhelmed with grief and human troubles. He guided her to the best possible result as a representative of natural humanity, in spite of the failure of His own children of faith. God still does that today. He saves people in spite of the failures of Christian believers.

God is interested in human troubles and He expects submission to His word and will in dealing with our need. Even in difficult circumstances that He does not take away. He is there to give what is needed to either solve the problem or live with the problem. The mistakes we make do have consequences. God assured them, as He does us, that he can bring spiritual blessing out of troubled events and times. He doesn't make demands of His people without a promise. "I will be with thee." He overrules events and circumstances by revealing there can be reasons to be encouraged by them and in them. Hagar was changed at least in her attitude. She realized God knew her and saw her. A well was named to remind her and all involved, that God keeps His promises.

**The Facts.** We still have the old nature. We are always in danger of failure when we get our eyes of faith off of our Lord. Temptation can come from unexpected sources, even those close to us. High motives don't negate wrong actions. Waiting in faith is one of the necessities of spiritual life. Keeping in constant touch with God is the secret to a meaningful and happy life.

When is faith full-grown, or does it ever mature to where it is intended to be? It is God's intention that we live by faith. Our daily living is intended to be one of trust and confidence in God. It is also intended that nothing else but faith is the guiding principle in our lives. Self-will, self-interest, and self-satisfaction are not to be the motivating factors in our lives at any stage of our growth in the Lord. Faith in God stands alone as the power, source, and substance of our living.

Those who are strong in faith will be tested by one means or another even as Abram was. He knew God's promise was true, but he added his own efforts to make the promise come true quicker. That is a



lack of faith. Waiting patiently and calmly when under pressure of doubt and skepticism, is hard to do. We may think as say we are trusting God alone, but the death of our own strength and will hasn't come yet. So, we seek to live by our own strength rather than die to ourselves and live by the power of God. When we are content to accept the death of self, we will still have struggles with the "bondmaid," the deeds of the law, and the temptation to do things our way. Hagar is a type of the natural world and doing things like everyone else does. If we seek our help from that source, "faith" would be using a worldly principle of natural strength.

It is when in despair we cast away that principle that seeks to control our lives, that we become truly alive and fruitful through the principle of grace given when grace is needed. Grace works through faith. When our natural strength is put away, and our impatience is calmed, God can act on the promises that He gives which are without the sin-polluted efforts of the "natural man."

**Abram got a son all right.** "Hagar" is fruitful but cannot produce the promised heir. The fruit of the flesh is very different from that which is by faith. Abram was promised that through his "seed," singular – one seed, the promises God made would be fulfilled.

**The results were not what was promised.** Sarai was despised by Hagar. Hagar became an arrogant surrogate wife. Abram was miserable in a household of contention. Sorrow comes when using that which is good is used out of place. "The law is good if it is used lawfully." Sorrow comes from exalting the law and making it the guiding principle of life rather than a living faith in a living God.

History has shown the effects of Abram's mistake in adding to the promise of God the results of his own impatience. The true seed that bears the right fruit, comes from death and barrenness. The power of resurrection life is then seen as God gives life in His own way. The inward actions of faith are our concern, not the outward fulfillment of that which is the result of man's own will. We will only get what we have been saved for when we act in faith. "Not the labor of my hands, can fulfill Thy law's demands. Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow; all for sin could not atone; thou must save and Thou alone."

**Flesh and law.** (Note Gal.4:21-26)

Gen.16. "With faith and patience inherit the promises" [Heb.6:12-15].

1. The Test: [15:4-6] His faith failed when tested in chapter 12. His patience breaks under testing in chapter 16.
2. The Temptation: The Egyptian woman. Hagar turned him off the path of faith. (Read Gal. 4:21-26). The temptation is to walk by sight (Egypt), not faith.
3. The Teaching: The covenants – bondage or liberty. The covenant of law leads to bondage (Hagar). The covenant of grace leads to liberty (Sarah).
4. The Tendency: To go back under the law. Believers have a bent to depend on rules which leads to pride, vainglory, envy; biting, and devouring [Gal.4:21; 5:15, 26].
5. The Tragedy: Continual conflict. The effort of the flesh [v.4] despises the one through whom blessing will come [Gal.5:17]. Despises, v.4; goes toward the world, v.7; hardness, v.12.
6. The Type: Apply it to ourselves. Believers may make law the rule of life (hard, self-righteous).

## **GENESIS 17**

### **ALMIGHTY GOD AND THE EVERLASTING COVENANT.**

When a person enters into a covenant relationship with God, there are certain things that give evidence of that being a fact. Our conscience is at rest when we are confident our sins are forgiven. A helpless soul has put full and complete trust in the Savior. Guilt and fear are lifted from our burdened souls because we know that Jesus died for us. Those four words are not mere words to us but are a reality by which we live. We grieve when we sin, and are concerned even when there is an inclination to do what we know is wrong. We have been crucified with Christ and have been raised to walk in the newness of life. Sin no longer reigns over us or in us. Resurrection life gives us a whole new life in which the Spirit of new life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death. The Great God, the Almighty Creator is our Covenant-keeping God. He is our Father, our Savior, our Lord.

The Bible is our charter of the covenant in which we have been made partakers of the heavenly calling. We have been sanctified by the Spirit, adopted into God's family, given a new nature, and are pardoned eternally. All this has happened because of the covenant relationship we have with God since we were born again. His law is in our hearts, His word is our spiritual food, and His light lifts our eyes of faith above the darkness of this age to the light of His glory.

Abraham was born in sin and laden with sin the same as we are. But God established His covenant with Abraham and his seed because Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. David also was a man born with a sinful nature and he failed to always keep the terms of the everlasting covenant into which he was joined with God, but a covenant was formed with him that continues today. From his seed a King shall reign over the nation of Israel and all the world will be blessed by Him.

The covenant into which believers in Christ are brought today is not based on works. The word of God assures us this covenant is sure, because it is based on the solid rock of the word and commands of God. God has committed Himself to fulfill His promises. Our cleansing from sin and being clothed in the righteousness of Christ, has been made and ratified in Him. That establishes our place in this new covenant. When we received Him as our own Savior, the covenant blessings became ours. To reject Him means that person has no claim on any of the mercies of God.

To respond to the grace of God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone as our Savior, established the terms of the covenant for us. That is all we can do. "By so much, Jesus was made a Surety of a better testament (covenant)." Believers who have humbled themselves in repentance to God and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, "live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." Our Lord Jesus is the Mediator of this new covenant. He made it possible to connect us with God. Separation between us and God is gone. We are united to God through Christ. We are alive in Christ and in fellowship with God.

The wonder of the new covenant that Abraham entered with God, is that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today, are part of the "multitude of nations" who share in the faith of Abraham. Instead of being the "exalted father" of a few when he was called Abram; when this covenant was established, he became Abraham, "the father of many (nations)." He had a whole new role that extended world wide and down through the generations of people of faith who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Abraham learned the way of fruitfulness is up to God, not necessarily what he had expected. When we are "on our face" before the holy God, many things become clear to us. We learn there our own

weakness and experience the blessings of God's mighty strength. "I am God Almighty, walk before Me and be perfect and I will multiply thee exceedingly." None of the promises of God are speculations. Seven times God said, "I will." When faith is truly in God alone, He will use the vessel He chooses, no matter who they are in the eyes of people. The aged, barren, free, spiritual woman was miraculously used by God to bring the desired blessing to her, her husband and to all who believe in Him. Faith learns God's way to blessing so the praise will be of God and to God, not of man and to man.

One letter added to Abraham's and Sarah's names, gave a new character trait to both of them. The letter H, is a special part of the name of God. H, is the "out-breathing," and those who are in the covenant relationship with God, are made fruitful by the out-breathing of the Holy Spirit who is in each child of faith in God. The new name brings in a new character as a result of the indwelling Spirit who forms us and uses us to carry out the plans and pleasure of God. When we are given power by the Spirit of God, we can go and bring forth "much fruit" that will remain.

In the forming of the covenant, there is one more matter to be attended to. The flesh must be judged. We are saved "from our sins," not in or with our sins. Self-judgment has nothing to do with our salvation, but it is revealed to those who are saved, that what we once were and did, is cut off. One said, "What I once loved, now I hate, and what I once hated, now I love." God clearly stated all of His "I will's." Now it is our turn: "thou shalt circumcise;" "come out from among them;" "glorify God in your body and spirit;" "mortify your members."

Fruitfulness in life is not an accident. We make choices and commitments that are fulfilled in the covenant. Obedience to God, renouncing of self-will, personal discipline are all evidences of our response to the terms of the covenant with God that we make on our part. Grace has certain demands in order to be enjoyed.

**The Fresh Revelation**, v.1-8. An emphasis is placed on God's power. New knowledge always has new responsibilities that go with it. New claims on us keep us from settling down. Such times are serious because we are conscious of the privileges, we are given by God to do those things that are extraordinary. That is reason to be alert and active. Abraham himself was a changed man as "the father of many." The land was to be an "everlasting possession, and he is to be the father of many nations.

**The Necessary Requirements**, v.9-14. All Abraham had to do to fulfill his part of the covenant, was to obey God's word. God was the Giver; man was the receiver – not an equal. Circumcision was to designate to Abraham and his seed they were different. They belonged to God, they were separated to God and purified before God. Separation from the world to God is the mark of the covenant of grace in which we have a part.

**The Further Revelation**, v.15-16. Sarah's name was changed and she was announced to be the mother of the promised seed.

**The Immediate Response**, v.17-18. Reverence and astonishment, but full trust was Abraham's response. He laughed in faith, not in unbelief as the news was almost too good to be true.

**The Full Revelation**, v.19-22. God's covenant will be established through Isaac, and that will be an everlasting covenant. Ishmael was not forgotten and was promised to be a great nation.

**The Loyal Response**, v.23-27. Abraham immediately acted that day on God's command. He had a new view of the character and purposes of God's will and God's grace.

Gen.17.

1. v.1-2. God reveals Himself as Almighty. Before He was a shield and reward for Abraham. At 99 Abraham learns to depend on God alone.
2. v.3. Abraham falls on his face. The effect of the revelation. Now he realizes God's greatness and his own nothingness. Previously it was himself and his need he thought of. It is true God is for us in grace and love. Higher than that though, is God is the great Object of our delight.
3. v.4. God communicates:
  - His grace to the nations.
  - He honors His servant and changes his name (father of a multitude).
  - Abraham would be fruitful for God.
  - Abraham and his family would enjoy the closest relationship with God.
  - He would have an everlasting covenant and an everlasting possession.
4. v.9-13. Responsibility toward God.
  - Walk suited to God because we are blessed, not to obtain blessing.
  - The flesh has to be refused. Have no confidence in the flesh; make no allowance for the flesh [Rom.2:29].
  - Sarah was blessed with Abraham. She had her named changed and had the laughter of joy.
5. v.18-21. Intercession (for Ishmael). Abraham pleads with God (read Rom.9:6-9).
6. v.22-27. Keeping covenant. Abraham immediately does what he heard.

## **GENESIS 18 and 19**

### **BLESSINGS AND PRIVILEGES**

As a person goes farther on the path of faith, it leads one farther away from the things of the world and the ways of the world, to increasing separation unto God. The nation, the community, friends and family may move away from us when we "come out from among them" and are separated to the Lord Jesus and follow the Bible. If we long for union with that which is worldly like Sodom, we will soon be seen no more among the people of God. We will be at a distance, like Lot, and those who love fellowship with the Lord and His people will not come to where we have chosen to be.

Inwardly, Lot had a mind toward what was right, but outwardly he compromised by gradual stages of departure. Self-love and the life of faith don't go together. When the spirit of faith in Christ fades, for a time there may be evidence of faith on occasion, but soon only a glimmer of light will be seen. Then it won't be too much longer and the light is so dim, it is forgotten that there is even any life there. The inward sense may be evident for a while, but the outward actions will be more obvious and soon that will be how one is identified. "He is just like us, so why do we need to be saved?"

Abraham was sitting in his tent door in the heat of the day. Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom in the evening. Abraham had three visitors he ran to meet, one of whom was the Lord. Lot had two angels come to him, not the Lord, and he rose to meet them and bowed low. "If any man love Me, he will keep My words and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Communion with the Lord is not possible in the sin-defiled places of the world which those away from God have chosen. Like Lot, we cannot correct or reform the world. It actually happens the opposite way, until a believer is "saved so as by fire." All they can do with the world is "Get out!" with nothing.

We are not here to clean up the world but to save some out of the world. It is our place to dwell apart and be separated unto God. To show the life of faith is the best way we have to show light to those in darkness. Abraham dwelt apart on the heights of Mamre. Lot was in the gate of Sodom calling those who lived there “brethren.” Abraham desired communion with the Lord and the two who were with Him and it was granted. The two angels who came to Lot at Sodom, first denied the invitation of Lot. Even then they were disturbed by the men of Sodom in the darkness of the night.

Those who live in the world, pass judgment on it for the evil going on, instead of judging themselves for even being there. Abraham had One Master, only One Lord. Lot tried to serve two masters and could not satisfy either. Abraham ran out to meet the three who came to him. Lot just rose up and bowed. Abraham prepared a calf and added a fine meal, calling it “a morsel of bread.” He stood by them as a servant while they ate. Lot made them a “feast” and fed them unleavened bread. Abraham’s wife Sarah was “in the tent.” Lot’s wife was in the house, settled down and planning to stay in Sodom. Abraham stood by his guests in quiet communion. Lot went out in anxiety for his children.

When we live like the world, do the things they do in the world and talk like those in the world, we can say what we want, but people of the world will pay little attention to what we say. Even if we are a little bit different, but still linger in the ways of the world, what we preach will not bear the fire of truth. Truth from worldly lips has no power. Spiritual words from carnal lips have no weight to them. We can’t always speak to those who profess to be Christians, as if they are spiritual people. Words of assurance, of the Gospel and exhorting the life of faith, fall on deaf ears when they come from those who are like the worldly system around them.

We cannot claim grace gives us license to be self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking, materialistic people because we are Christians who have been forgiven. True Christians belong to Christ and follow Him. To claim a “little city” is a safe place, is a compromise. A Christian cannot stay in the place of compromise. When we choose to go to “the mountain” at our convenience, is far different than acting on the command and guidance of God. It is possible to fall into sin on the mountain when we act in self-will. It is hard to live on high ground when our hearts are set on “low ground” living.

A righteous man out of the mind and will of God, does damage to a lot more people than themselves. Lot’s daughters, and then the Moabites and Ammonites after them, were a corrupted people. Their seed lived in shame and grief in the wilderness beyond Jordan. It is a sad day when a person who professes to have faith in Christ, turns away from the life of faith in God to follow the ways of the world.

### **Genesis 18. FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD**

Our life with God when we are believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, involves the daily experience of “sonship” as the sons and daughters of the Living God who is now our Father. We “worship” God as our Father in spirit and in truth, and the Lord Jesus Christ as our Redeemer and living Lord. We have been given a holy “stewardship” that makes our life not only worth living now as servants of God, but makes it possible for us to lay up treasure in heaven. We have “fellowship” with God in personal life and united assembly life. We are able to share all parts of our lives with our God.

### **The friend of God.**

**The divine appearance, 1-8:** as a guest of Abraham, the Lord could have fellowship and experience friendship that was visible as the Lord appeared in human form with two created angels with Him. Abraham was courteous and hospitable as he actively served the Lord and stood by as a respectful servant.

**The divine assurance, 9-15:** God knows our names and the name of every person in Sodom as well as in Mamre. The promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah was repeated and the nearness of its fulfillment was stated. Sarah and Abraham were reminded that nothing is too hard for the Lord. She was made aware of God's knowledge of everything, of God's character and consequently she was afraid.

**The divine announcement, 16-21:** a revelation was made to the friend of God. Abraham was going to be a blessing to all nations, so he needed to know why two city/states were going to be destroyed. Solemn lessons seen in things that happen to others, influence us and command our obedience. Sin has its consequences. Fellowship involved union and communion in both good and bad things. Intimacy, revelation and association are all part of fellowship.

1. v.1-7. Divine visitation. Abraham had a personal visitation of the Lord to him. We need the personal manifestation of the Lord; to answer God's call; to have no confidence in the flesh (read Jn.14:16-25: "manifest"; "come to"; "make our abode.").
2. v.6-8. Divine ministry. This visitation leads to service.
3. v.9-15. Divine communication. God's assurance of coming blessing (Jn.14:3-18. "I will come again"; "I will not leave"; "I will come to you". Inward unbelief is known by God.
4. v.16-20. Divine prophecy. God comes to Abraham as a friend (read Isa.41:8; Jn.15:15). Judgment is coming. v.16, look toward Sodom; v.22, went toward Sodom; 19:1, came to Sodom.
5. v.22-23. Divine intercession. Intercession in confidence and nearness.

## **Genesis 19. FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD.**

### **Intercession for others.**

**Privileged position:** a spiritual relationship with God is real. A sense of the presence of God is felt. Respect for God is obvious. Openness before God is normal. Accepting God's will without question is expected.

**Earnest spirit:** the intercessor's compassion is obvious. Definiteness in requests is expected. Humbleness is the appropriate attitude. Confidence in God is without question. Boldness in prayer is sincere and grateful.

**Urgent plea:** Must the unrighteous perish with the wicked? Is grace sufficient for those in the wrong place? Is there any salt at all that can prevent complete corruption? Can one believer's influence hold back judgment on many? A believer who prays is sure "the Judge of all the earth" will do right!

**Divine encouragement:** God does answer prayer. God will spare many for the sake of a few who believe in Him. There is power and influence in even those whose faith is weak.

**Deep humility:** friendship with God is not a casual matter. We must never speak to God as if we were on equal footing or in a manner unbecoming to the Monarch of the universe. We must always be conscious of God's holiness and our sinfulness; God's greatness and our nothingness.

**Earnest persistence:** Six times Abraham interceded for the wicked cities. Six times God answered. Abraham was concerned for Lot no doubt but Lot was where he should not have been.

**Natural limitation:** believers can never know the extent and effect of sin. Only God knows the awfulness of sin and how it must be dealt with. God's mercy and longsuffering in the face of human wickedness is beyond our comprehension.

**Gracious answer:** Lot's preservation was connected to Abraham intercession.

- Intercession is a solemn responsibility. It is important that we pray for others.
- Intercession has marvelous possibilities. Captives are freed, the hungry are fed, the sick are healed and souls are saved.
- Intercession has essential conditions. Close fellowship with God is needed. Authority in prayer is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Union with our Lord and submission to His will are expected. Union and communion with the Lord can be maintained.

### A Sad Story

The course of Lot's life is a lesson for everyone who professes to be a child of God. As long as he was closely associated with a mature believer who was a man of true faith, he did pretty well as far as living as a believer himself. When it was necessary to separate because of their possessions increasing, Lot had to take responsibility for his own life and decision making.

When he pitched his tent toward Sodom, he placed himself where the temptations of city living and ungodly people were in front of him every day. Consequently, it wasn't long before he entered the city, left tent living and settled in among the worldly people who lived all around him until it was hard to tell any difference. When the people of the city were taken captive, so was Lot and his family. When Abram rescued him, it didn't change his mind about the world system in which he had lived. He returned to it without a hesitation and lived there the same as he did before. The whole story of Lot is full of solemn, seriously sad events that provide a warning and instruction for every believer today.

**The visitors, v.1-3.** The two angels who accompanied the Lord to where Abraham dwelt, went on without the Lord to Sodom and found Lot in a place of importance in that wicked city. That was no place for one who is a believer in the Lord. Their first reply to his invitation to go to his place was to decline the invitation. They were there for judgment, not fellowship.

**The depravity, v.4-11.** Human depravity seemingly knows no depths to which people are willing to go to seek satisfaction for their lust. For a believer to be willing to sacrifice his children to save his own life or that of his friends, shows how far away from the Lord a person can go.

**The warning, v.12-14.** "Get out" of the city was the message to Lot and his family. The warning was plain. "The Lord sent us to destroy it." Lot believed the message because he knew what Sodom was like in the eyes of a righteous person. His soul was "vexed" but his family was so used to the sins of Sodom they were tolerant of all that went on. They paid no attention to him because he had lived like the people of Sodom far too long.

**The deliverance, v.15-22.** Lot's urging of his wife and daughters to leave, didn't create a sense of urgency in them. Deliverance came when the messengers of God laid hold of them and pulled them out of the city. Even when God's servants told them to "escape to the mountain," Lot himself was not willing to go that far. The patience and longsuffering of God is always a wonder of mercy and grace, but these have their limits.

**The judgment, v.23-26.** Lot and those with him just got to Zoar, when the judgment of God fell on Sodom and Gomorrah. Even then, Lot's wife was still attracted to Sodom to the extent that she did what the servants of the Lord told them not to do. She died there on the spot, even though she was outside the city. When parents are weak and yield to the world, there should be no surprise when their children do the same.

**The intercession, v.27-29.** A man standing alone before the Lord at the break of day, had prayed the prayers of an intercessor. God answered his prayer and went even farther to save four.

**The shame, v.30-38.** Instead of relief and joy at his deliverance, Lot was willing to turn to drink when his worldly daughters brought it to him. And he got drunk not just once, but twice. He had gone on a real “bender.” In his shame, he went into a moral darkness and forgetfulness that follows a shameful downfall.

- We learn from Sodom the depths of the depravity of man when the restraints of God’s standards of righteousness are removed from a nation. We are challenged by the certainty that divine judgment follows human sin. We learn that even for great wickedness, God waits in mercy for one man and his family to be saved.
- We learn from Lot, that it is wrong to put the things of this world: possessions, pleasures and prosperity first. They can soon take over the mind and heart of one who allows that in their life. We learn that we are weak in ourselves, and if we live to please other Christians, we are in danger of not pleasing God.
- We learn from Abraham that true consecration comes from the heart. Superficial responses to God’s grace and mercy, leave us with a life lost like Lot’s, even if we are saved as so by fire. Half-godliness and half-worldliness are impossible companions. Our light will shine when we live on the high ground of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, apart from the world.

Gen.18-19.

1. Contrast: Abraham in his tent door; Lot in the gate of Sodom in a place of administration.
2. Downward: 13:12- “toward Sodom.” 14:12- “dwelt in Sodom.” 19:1- “sat in the gate of Sodom” (read Lu.17:28-32).
3. Breakdown: Sodom was wicked and they were sinners before the Lord exceedingly. Lot was not a witness to grace but a judge in wickedness.
4. Warning: “get out” (read 2Cor.6:14-15; Rev.18:4).
5. Angels: Lot was vexed with filthy conversation but had no communion with the Lord. (Read 1Cor.3:15).
6. Inconsistency: No power to restrain wickedness. He was willing to abandon his daughters.
7. Failure: He seemed as one that mocked. His life was a contradiction to what he said.
8. Hesitation: He lingered in fear and unbelief. He wanted to go to a city instead of a mountain.
9. Wife: A false professor was the nearest to him.
10. Fear: He goes to the mountain in fear, not in faith and fades out of the picture.

## **GENESIS 20**

### **FAILING TO HOLD FAITH FIRMLY**

It is possible for truth to be told in a way that is deceptive so that it gives a false impression. When for one reason or another, we are found in a situation in which we think it would be expedient to shade the truth by our tone of voice, or some other means, we have sinned. Sin is not merely in the words that we say, but in the intentions of our heart and mind. What is the objective in saying or doing a certain thing? What will be the expected outcome if I do, or don’t do this? What will be the final result if I take this course of action or say these things? Such questions should be considered before taking a questionable course. If for some reason we find ourselves in a position where we fear for our life, we need to remember “our times” are in the hands of the Almighty God.

Something that has worked in the past, like telling half-truths, must be guarded against. It has the potential of becoming a habit, and habits are hard to break. It is important to put deliberate faith into



action when we are in questionable situations. Abraham had told the same half-truth in Egypt years before and he did the same thing again when he went into the land of the Philistines. Sinful tendencies do not go away just because we haven't done them in the recent past.

From our minds, spring thoughts and actions that can quickly bring us down spiritually to where we sin easily. Sarah was well advanced in years and was going to have going to have a child. Perhaps Abimelech wanted to make an alliance with Abraham and to take a wife from another tribal leader was standard practice in that time in history. His own household women were withheld from conceiving by the purpose of the Lord. Sarah would have been a pledge of an alliance with Abraham who was a well-known force to be reckoned with in the area of Canaan. Abraham still had his pilgrim character, but his private army, his prestige and his wealth would have made him a person to be feared in the land of the Philistines.

Abraham had been promised by God, the land the Philistines occupied. The promises of God to His people, are not to those who do not truly know Him even though they "believe" in Him. Those who do not accept God's universal sovereignty and do not obey Him or worship Him in spirit and in truth, may say true words and be spoken to by God. However, spiritual truth is only able to be known by spiritual faith. The desire to know heavenly things from an earthly knowledge derived by mere human reasoning, will never be fulfilled. Faith in God and His word, are far removed from the concept of putting faith in something. To trust an innate object or even a fellow human being, can easily be done without even thinking about it.

Faith in God as a Person to whom I am committed, means that without reservation, I step into a life that is unknown to me. In that new life, I am confident that "step by step," the way will open up before me, so each day is a walk through the unknown. I can live, walk and work without knowing what is ahead and not worry about it. The things I don't know and are beyond my capacity to do anything about, are all taken care of by the One in whom I have placed my faith.

In Old Testament times, all of life was a religion. Pagans had gods for rain, wind, seed time, growth and harvest. People who had faith in God were aware of their dependence on God for life, breath, and all things that pertained to living and dying. There wasn't a real distinction between what was secular and what was religious. Their life-style took into account the fact they couldn't survive without an all-wise, all-powerful, all-righteous and all-knowing God. Behavior in every action was either to fear God and obey Him, or replace Him with idols to represent powers that were greater than human beings. Some kings were deified because of their powerful position in a nation and their "life or death" authority which they took upon themselves.

Abraham thought Abimelech was one who didn't fear God, and consequently in fear for his own life, he misrepresented the truth. God does speak to those who have some knowledge of Him even though they do not have saving faith in Him. "God speaks once, yea twice, yet man perceives it not." Dreams, visions, pain and various ways are used by God to awaken people to the reality of God and their need of Him. Abraham thought there was no fear of God in Gerar. Abimelech was not a person of faith, but God was able to speak to him with a clear message, and he got the message. Fellowship with God is only possible for those "fear" God. Every person is "God conscious," but not many "fear God" or "work righteousness" before Him. In grace, God stopped Abimelech from going forward into further sin.

Even though Abimelech had been deceived and never knew Sarah was Abraham's wife, his intention was such that God had punished his household by closing the wombs of the women. Sins of intention are not overlooked or unknown to God. The consequences of Abimelech's intention lasted only as long as Sarah was in his harem. The punishment imposed, made Abimelech know that God was with Abraham. Even though Abimelech had reason to despise Abraham, he knew Abraham's God was One to fear and respect.

The gifts Abimelech gave to Abraham after Sarah returned, testified that he wanted a connection with the successful life of Abraham. He wanted an alliance to be maintained. Abraham had to confess his sin to Abimelech as well as God in order to return to fellowship with God and communication on a reasonable basis with Abimelech. The principle of confession in order to maintain fellowship is still the only way peace can be preserved between those involved. To cover sin leaves a cloud and barrier over any relationship. Abimelech wanted to share his land with Abraham, and yet he was not the one to whom the land was promised. Those who are associated with the people of God, are often blessed just because of that connection. That doesn't make them children of God. People can do Christian things, say Christian words, sing Christian songs, attend a Christian church and still not be Christians.

### **Fear of causing offense**

**The possibilities of sin:** fear of man, selfishness, lack of trust in God, rebuke by unbelievers for inconsistency, can all happen when we act on our own without knowing the mind of God.

**The perils of sin:** habits we onetime had, can rise up to bring about our downfall. Weakness and natural tendencies take control of us. Fellow-believers are affected because of our bad example. Unbelievers become disgusted with behavior in Christians that is worse than theirs.

**The persistence of sin:** even though our standing in Christ is secure, our state when we sin, is not acceptable before God or man. Awareness of this fact should always keep us alert to the danger of sin around us.

**The protection against sin:** we are accepted in the Beloved, but are not always acceptable to Him. God has provided abundant protection for us to not have to submit to sin's attraction and attacks. We are expected to "live and walk in the Spirit." When we do this, we will not yield to the lusts of the flesh and mind. We need to be aware of things Satan uses to lead us astray and cause us to fall.

When believers walk in the Spirit and live daily under His control and guidance, we will be willing and able to stand against the "wiles of the devil." We will be willing and able to walk in the strength and power of God in this new life we have. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." We will be more than conquerors through the power of Christ who loves us and lives in us.

### **Works of the Flesh.**

Gen.20

1. v.2-3. Repeated sin: The fear of man was more important than God's assurance the heir would come through Sarah. One who is not a novice but walked the path of separation, can break down because of fear when faith is needed. The flesh never changes. It may use different forms. We are unable to do anything without God. God deals with, and acts for His failing people.
2. v.9-10. Rebuke justified: He had failed in faith, wronged his wife, wronged a man of the world. He had sunk below the conduct of decent men of the world. Abraham acts with

- duplicity saying, “There is no fear of God in this place,” and he didn’t have the fear of God himself. He was thinking his own thoughts and thinking only of himself.
3. v.11-13. **Lame excuse:** It is always hard to say, “I have sinned.” Abraham seeks to excuse himself by not telling all the truth.
  4. v.13. **Root of unbelief:** He lowers the testimony of God to the apprehension of the world. “God caused me to wander.” He didn’t talk about the heavenly country and city with foundations. He gave the impression he was a pilgrim.
  5. **Unbecoming conduct:** In weakness and unbelief he accepts sheep, oxen, men servants, maid servants and money. In a time of power and victory, he refused from a thread to a shoe latchet. Abimelech, in contempt, reproves Sarah as well.
  6. v.17-18. **Recovery:** After their failure is exposed, Abraham again takes his true place in reference to the world as an intercessor.

## **GENESIS 21**

### **THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENS**

It is everyday business with God to do what is impossible to people. He created the world out of nothing, and made everything on it in six days. He maintains order in the universe in which there are billions of huge objects that are speeding in many directions and spinning in different ways at different speeds without cataclysmic collisions. He gives life to plants and animals that is renewed in specific times and ways. He made human beings with a spirit, soul and body. He made it possible for Abraham and Sarah to have a son after they were beyond child-bearing age. He kept them alive until Isaac was well into adulthood.

The promises of God are always kept, even though we may be surprised at the way He keeps them. He doesn’t always do the same thing in the same way for everyone so that we will learn to accept and trust whatever He does by faith. Sarah’s joy abounded when Isaac was born even though she had been kept waiting for a normal lifetime for the promise to be fulfilled. She had doubted until it actually happened and Isaac was born, a miracle child. We can live in peace and confidence when our faith in God and His word is real. Doubt casts a shadow over what is intended to give us joy and freedom. Faith lets us praise God and worship the Father in spirit and in truth. We can live full and abundant lives when we live in the good of the promises that have yet to be fulfilled.

### **The birth of the heir.**

Isaac was born out of the common course of nature. The spring of life comes from God, but it became real to Abraham by faith. Later Sarah who doubted, was soon made to realize the reality of God’s promises. The new life that began to grow and soon showed itself, was from the Life-Giver. It brought the joy of faith and spiritual willingness to take God at His word.

This is how the new life of a believer and spiritual birth today is experienced. The seed of the word of God is planted in the soul. It is watered by the truth of God and the life God gives makes itself known. “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which lives and abides forever.” The Holy Spirit joins with that word so a person is “born of the Spirit.” When that new life is evident in a person, the spirit of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, makes self-judgment and the “putting away of the filth of the flesh,” a real spiritual circumcision.

When new life is real, it becomes more obvious as time passes, and we are “weaned” to “walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.” It is then we will likely experience mockery from those who love the world, try to keep the law and be good people, become religious “practioners” and self-opinionated people who think what they believe is more important than what God says in the Bible. One who is an heir of God and joint-heir with Jesus, cannot continue in the deeds of the law, or their own works to be justified. The bondage of sin and religious laws are not compatible with salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. That which is not of faith must be let go and sent away.

**The Promised Son,** v.1-8. God continually teaches those who believe in Him, lessons for our learning and living. God’s word will be fulfilled; His promises will be kept. Our doubts will only give us a lack of peace and contentment, and may even bring us grief.

Abraham’s trust in God resulted in him naming the newborn son, “Isaac (Laughter),” which was his first joyful response, when in faith he believed the Lord when He told him he would have a son [Gen.17:17]. The designation of circumcision was to identify him and his life as belonging to God.

The custom of having a feast on the day a child was weaned from his mother, was of special significance in a spiritual sense. It was then children and infants were to praise the Lord themselves in words and songs of praise [Ps.8:1-2; Mat. 21:16]. Teaching children profound truths, is much easier when set to a tune. The words are there but they need to be impressed in their minds in a way that appeals to their own minds by singing them out loud and in a cadence with other children.

**The Profound Sadness,** v.9-11. For a seventeen-year-old son, who had been the center of interest in a household, and who was the focus of his father’s attention, to give place to a little boy, was hard to take. Isaac took first place in Abraham’s life and Ishmael would likely feel he had been robbed of his position, and so he mocked Isaac. Ishmael had been “wild” and remained that as an adult.

When we, like Abraham, move out of the mind of God, the consequences of that action may never go away. The jealousy, malice and anger in Abraham’s household continued, but it was now Sarah doing to Hagar what Hagar had done to her. For seventeen years Ishmael had been the center of attention and Hagar would have had an important place. Now, on this sad day, Ishmael and Hagar had to go.

**The Perfect Strength,** v.12-14. God’s strength is made perfect in times of human weakness. Our sins and mistakes have results that we could grieve over constantly until we wallow in guilt for our whole life. We need to look above all that is past, accept the consequences over which we can do nothing about, and accept the consolation that God gives. God comforted Abraham in his grief. God guided him with holy wisdom, to listen to Sarah’s counsel. Sarah must have been a bit hard to get along with, but she could look ahead and see the household difficulties would only get worse and worse. Not only would it affect them all, but it had the potential to make Isaac fail in his coming leadership responsibilities. He was of a quiet nature and Ishmael was aggressive and wild. Ishmael had to go out on his own.

God made a promise to Abraham to encourage him, saying Ishmael would become a great nation because he was Abraham’s son, but he was not the promised seed that would bless the world. It would have been hard for Abraham to watch Ishmael and Hagar fade into the distance permanently, but God’s servant obeyed. Neither Hagar or Ishmael made a fuss over the break in their lives, so perhaps

they were relieved to get away and be on their own away from the tensions under which they had been living. That which is of the world, is uncomfortable when surrounded by that which is spiritual.

**God is faithful.** God is always true to His word. All God says will not fail; it will come to pass. This is the foundation of our faith. When God says something, we can rest on His counsel and guidance with absolute confidence.

**God is wise.** The mistake that created the problem, was Abraham's, but God can take the tangles made by self-will, and through discipline and its pain, bring blessing to our spirit. He can overrule our mistakes, and in His wisdom, use it for our good. The "wisdom and knowledge of God" will forever amaze us at its depths.

**God is sufficient.** God's grace is wholly sufficient to meet our need. He knows what we are able to bear, He encourages us with His promises, assures us of His presence and power, and enables us to do what He intends us to accomplish.

### **LIFE GOES ON**

It would have been major news across the land of the Philistines when the word was out that Abraham had a son when he was one hundred years old. Both he and Sarah were long past the age of normal conception. To people whose religion was a major part of their everyday life, a miracle child would have made all those who heard nervous wondering what it could mean for them and their future. Things that happen out of the ordinary do have an effect on us, but when something goes beyond the bonds of nature, people begin to have the fear of God about them wondering what will happen next.

Abimelech and his chief captain didn't waste time making sure they were on Abraham's good side. The covenant between two humans who were equals would have been to try to secure the safety of his people. The bond woman, Hagar, and Ishmael had moved on to the east. Because of the "blindness in part" that was on them like religious Jews, the well nearby was not seen at first. The Jew "after the flesh" was cast out, and now the Gentile king was seeking a lasting peace. The effects of faith may not be experienced by most people, but it is obvious to all who are willing to look and think, that there is real faith in those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. A new life, a new day, a new start takes place when one is born again by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit seals us and places us in the family of God permanently.

Ordinary daily living and routine events can be the best test of our character. Dramatic events stand out, but usually only come occasionally. Most of us ordinary people live ordinary lives from one ordinary day to the next. To live quietly and confidently each day doing the simple things that count in families and assemblies of God's people, reveal what we are like inwardly. To be consistent even when no one notices, is how grace and truth become noticed by those who are agitated by all the evils around us. When we accept gratefully the ordinary things God provides, and use them to the best of our ability without complaint or making comparisons; that shows what we really are like.

**A Testimony,** v.22. Abimelech and his general made a special errand to tell Abraham they knew that "God is with you in every thing you do." This is the kind of testimony every believer would love to hear. It indicates the genuineness of his faith was obvious to those who knew him or knew of him.

**A Request,** v.23. The unbeliever who lived near Abraham wanted peace for himself and his people. The friendship of righteous people may make sinners uneasy, but it can be an advantage to us in

simple temporal things in life. We are not perfect, but it is a good thing if people can see the difference our faith in God means to us compared to the ungodly.

**A Response**, v.24. Abraham was glad to express his cooperation to the extent he could. To be willing to meet the needs others ask of us, and to be openly appreciative of their trust, will calm their fears. In that way we show we have no hidden agendas toward them but simply want them to know who we are and why we believe in Jesus.

**A Reminder**, v.25. Difficulties between neighbors need to be cleared away before real peace can happen. When a problem is made known to both parties, some action can be taken to rectify the barrier and return to peaceful living.

**An Explanation**, v.26. Sometimes people are ignorant of a problem until it is quietly and calmly pointed out. To be able to take care of any misunderstanding as quickly and fairly as possible is the way to deal with problems.

**A Covenant**, v.27-33. This is the first recorded covenant made between equals that we read of in the Bible. There were covenant presents given and received. The extra gifts Abraham gave Abimelech were additional security which would not soon be forgotten. Seven ewe lambs were set aside and given because of “the well” problem. There have been seven wells found at Beersheba. Peace was made and secured. Abraham remained at Beersheba and the two other men went back to their place satisfied.

**An Addition**, v.33-34. Abraham added further to his testimony a grove of trees which he planted to be a memorial of the covenant and the peace he desired to be maintained. In the course of the ordinary events of life, Abraham learned much more about God. He learned he is the “Everlasting God.” God is unchangeable and dependable. He was made more aware of the fact that the One he knew as the “Most High God,” and the “Almighty God,” is the same forever and ever as the “Eternal God.” In the ordinary course of life lived in fellowship with our Lord, we will learn in a quiet way, the immensity of who God is and how significant our fellowship is to us and to Him.

**There is great spiritual value in ordinary living**. Crisis times are quite rare and great occasions are few and far between. Opportunities to be faithful in everyday living is how we grow. Communion with God is a daily event when we choose to “mount up with wings as eagles.” The occasional emergencies are when we “run and are not weary.” The real ordinary routine of daily life is when we “walk and don’t faint.” An ordinary life that is ordered, so we can make every occasion a testimony to God’s grace, is when we demonstrate our faithful loyalty to our Lord.

**The right attitude toward unbelievers has great value**. We need to live each day conscious as to how those who “are without,” see the value of being a Christian. The walk of faith should be “circumspectly (accurately),” “attractive” and becoming to the Gospel of Christ.

**The great value of new experiences with God**. Believers are always learning from the time we are saved to the time we die, as long as we are obedient to God. We learn of His fullness in every way when we are in need. We learn to be faithful in service is doing the little things in the name of the Lord. We become more equipped for the big things by doing the small things well. We are “training for reigning!”

### **We learn from Genesis 21**

The heir born, v.1-7; the bondwoman and her son cast out, v.8-21; the world owns that God is with this man of faith, v.22-34.

1. v.1-5. The birth: Isaac (“laughter”); this time everything is done according to God’s will and word. Gal.4:4, “When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son”. This birth is a type of Christ.
2. v.6-9. The effect: Some rejoiced; some mocked. The same was true of Christ’s coming. His supreme place caused jealousy and enmity of the world.
3. v. 10. The lesson: We are objects of sovereign grace. In Gal.4:28-31, Isaac is a type of the believer walking after the Spirit; Ishmael is a type of one walking after the flesh.
4. v.11-12. The flesh: The more Christ has His true place in our affections, the more we are aware of the character of the flesh. We still want to exalt self. The Corinthians were indulging the flesh in a worldly form. The Colossians were ministering to the flesh in religious ritual. The Galatians were giving place to the flesh by legality. We are to refuse the flesh – it calls for self-denial, and will bring suffering but blessing.
5. v.22-24. The testimony: The one who had reproved Abraham, now acknowledges, “God is with thee in all that thou doest.” If we refuse the flesh and walk by faith in separation from the world, people will think the same of us.
6. v.25-34. The world: The world admits that God is with His people, but will seek to stop the means of spiritual refreshment. We may resist and reprove the world, but do it with the spirit of grace that imparts spiritual blessing (seven ewe lambs).

## **GENESIS 22**

### **THE OFFERING OF ISAAC**

This is the climax of God’s dealing with Abraham. This is the supreme test of Abraham’s faith and confidence in God’s promises. God confirms this covenant with a solemn oath. From this time on in the narrative of Abraham’s life, there are only accounts given of events as Abraham puts his affairs in order in view of the future. He bought a burying place in the land God promised to him, but that was not an act of doubt but of courtesy and common sense in the present circumstance. Some things in life may cost us, but if it is able to testify to our faith in God, any cost is worth the right outcome. The demands put on Christians are often unrealistic and unfair, but the results may be far more effective than the cost.

Abraham also wanted a suitable wife for Isaac before he died and he wanted to make an appropriate distribution of all he had to those to whom he had an obligation. His story began with “Go out from your country,” and near the end of his story it was, “Take your son... and offer him.” At the beginning he was to “Go to a land...,” and at the end “Go to a mountain.” When he first came to the land God promised him, he built an altar “By the great tree of Moreh.” Near the end he built an altar in “the region of Moriah.” Before he left his father’s house, God made promises to Abraham. After he offered Isaac, God confirmed those promises.

Faith does not choose its own time and place to be tested, but it leaves behind it a life of testimony to God’s grace and love. Faith will be tested in many ways, but when we have been crucified with Christ, we are raised from spiritual deadness to a spiritually resurrected life in Christ. Christ now lives in us and when we may have to bear in our mortal bodies evidence of our faith, the trials that produce that evidence is a testimony to the faithfulness of God.

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ for us, has opened up a whole new life lived on “redemption ground, the ground of peace.” God’s grace allows us to experience such momentous blessings, that we are changed. We died to the world when Christ died. We have been buried to the world and are raised to walk in newness of life. As changed people we “walk in the light as He is in the light,” and the unfruitful works of darkness lose their attraction to us.

### **ULTIMATE OBEDIENCE**

Genesis 22 is a marvelous presentation of the love of God in giving His Son. Morally it sets forth, in a special way, the faith of Abraham.

- v.1. The supreme test: No one has ever had his or her faith tested beyond that of Abraham. The one in whom all the promises were centered was Isaac. He acted not according to reason but in faith.
- v.3-6. The act of obedience: Job submitted passively to what God allowed. Abraham was called to act in a way contrary to nature, to paternal love, and to divine and human laws deliberately. Faith knows that those which sleep in Jesus, “Will God bring with Him.”
- v.7-8. Father and son: The first mention of love in the Bible [v.2] is significantly in connection with the love of the father acting in the fear of God. He overcame the fear of man.
- v.9-10. Perfect obedience: The perfect submission and uncomplaining obedience of the Son to the Father, “Not My will, but Thine be done.” Isaac bore the wood; the knife and the fire (judgment and death) are in the hands of the father (read Ps.88:6-7).
- v.5. Perfect communion: “Abide ye here.” There are some things only comprehended by the Father and the Son [Jn.5:17,30].
- v.9-10. Perfect submission: Abraham builds the altar, Abraham lays the wood in order, Abraham binds his son, Abraham laid him on the altar, Abraham stretched forth his hand, Abraham took the knife. “He is led as a lamb to the slaughter..”

Comparison and contrast: In other offerings, the victim was killed and then laid on the altar. Here, as a type of Christ, the living sacrifice is on the altar. The type stops here because “God spared not His Son.” In a figure Abraham received Isaac from the dead [Heb.11:9]. The ram then takes up the type of Christ as God provides for “Himself a lamb.”

The test was not to make him fall, but to deepen his capacity to obey God and thereby develop his character. The refining process is to extract what is good and precious from all the dross around. To obey God may mean giving up something we really want. Obedience should not be expected to be easy or to come naturally. It is difficult to let go of what we deeply love. Have you withheld your love, your children, your time from God? Abraham went farther and higher because he was willing to give his son. That is like God. Abraham received abundant blessing because he did not hold back, but obeyed his God. God in turn blessed him...

- God gave his descendants the ability to conquer their enemies.
- God promised him children and grandchildren who would bless the whole earth.

**The Test**, v.1-2. Following times of blessing, discipline proves whether what we have experienced really changes us in our character and life, or if it was merely a temporary change. God tests us to bring out good. Satan tempts us to bring out evil. God allows trials to develop faith that does not question the purposes and will of God. When that faith becomes real, we are brought nearer to God.



**The Trial**, v.3-10. There didn't seem to be any hesitation in Abraham to what God told him. He "rose early" and did what God said. The first step of faith is significant. He believed God and believed God's promises, so he did not question God's intention. He said, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." He knew Isaac would be coming back with him.

Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb?" didn't seem to bother Abraham. He knew God would provide and do just what He wanted. His responsibility was to do what God told him to do. God didn't want Isaac's life but Abraham's loyalty.

**The Triumph**, v.11-14. God had everything timed so that at the right moment He spoke again to Abraham. Abraham was prepared to give God his very best which is all faith can do. Neither Abraham nor Isaac would ever forget that event, that day and that powerful and triumphant intervention of God.

When we look back over our life's history, there will be times when people who live by faith will bear testimony to the power, presence and reality of God providing for us what is needed, and likely not only meeting the need but surpassing what we could have expected.

**The Testimony**, v.15-19. God spoke clearly and personally to Abraham when he took His solemn oath that He knew the reality of Abraham's faith.

Faith takes God at His word. That is the foundation of our life, peace, strength and progress.

Faith is strong by its very nature. Faith goes far beyond emotions or self-sacrifice. Faith believes that God can raise one's own son from the dead to keep His promises. The test resulted in faith being vindicated.

Faith has its source in God. God is a reality to those who put their faith in Him. There is no skepticism or doubting when God's will is made plain. Faith believes God.

Faith's secret is unquestioning trust in God. Twice Abraham said to God, "Here am I." Fellowship with God is real, personal and responsive. As we abide in Christ, faith grows strong, love grows deep and our confident hope grows higher than ever.

## **JEHOVAH-JIREH**

The power of faith is in the great blessing of grace. Faith is in the hearts of those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ. Faith prevails with God, and over sin and Satan. Faith overcomes impossibilities. Faith leads to victory over great obstacles. Faith provides a place of security in the storms of life. Faith gives a Christian a shield in the warfare in which we are engaged. Faith discerns things that cannot be seen. Faith lets us learn the mind of God, and the power of the cross. Faith puts Jesus on the throne of our life and produces love for Him that is stronger than death. Faith opens our hearts and mouths to pray and praise God. Faith makes life an exciting journey of spiritual service. Faith gives light to see all that it focuses on.

Faith is a treasure to use now. Faith is more valuable than all the wealth of the world. Faith takes us through trials to see the reality and purpose of God's grace in all its strength. Faith is as evident as the courage of a soldier in a battle; the root of a tree in a strong wind; a rock standing against the waves of the sea; the foundation of a building – all unseen but all evident.

And often unexpectedly, faith is tested. In Abraham's case, it was tested in an unprecedented way. His joy in Isaac, the promised seed, must have been frozen solid "after these things" had happened. "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom you love, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of!"

One might think, “Have I been wrong all the time? Did I get things right, or is it all nothing but a dream?” And then, faith steps up and makes itself known. God had been proven before and had always been true to His word. There is no reason to doubt Him now. Isaac may die, but faith does not die. God will bring him back to life so the promised Seed will come through him. “God cannot lie!” Abraham rose early to do exactly what God’s will was without question or complaint. What great faith!

Three days and fifty miles later “the place” was before Abraham. The time had come to take Isaac alone to the place of sacrifice. Only God would witness this event of personal faith in Him. Perhaps agony of soul would mix with the calmness of spirit that was in Abraham and Isaac, both who knew God by personal faith. The calmness of peace, firm steps, persevering faith, the voice of trust, “God will provide Himself a lamb,” all testified to real trust in God. He will do what He promises in His own way.

Faith is the simple element of unreserved trust. It is consistent in what it does without trembling questions. It looks above what is ordinary and above the sky to the face of God. “God will provide...” It goes forward step by step knowing that God leads us and God leads to glory; God’s glory is unspeakable blessing.

Faith binds Isaac and doesn’t inquire as to if this is right or not. Faith takes the knife in hand and raises it above the young, strong man who is bound on the altar, with the confidence that whatever is the outcome of this action, Isaac will live in one way or another and they will go home together. God promised! At the very last moment faith is rewarded. Isaac lives as one who was raised from the dead. Victory, peace and joy unite and are evident as God speaks again. “Now I know...” Faith triumphs, faith is honored, faith is confirmed and faith is expanded.

A new life of unique joy, heavenly joy, is experienced as God demonstrated His love in a way that was greater and higher than ever before. “In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.” That place is where every person of faith goes when we are in need, in danger and are fearful in our weakness. At Jehovah-Jireh God is there in His strength, love and mercy with a full supply of needed grace. It is there our guilt was laid on Jesus. It is there our hearts burn within us. It is there our strength is renewed as eagle’s wings. It is there in the high place of fellowship with God, that the whole universe of divine grace is opened way beyond our normal or natural understanding.

Jehovah-Jireh supplies grace when grace is needed. The place of sacrifice is the place of blessing. It is our place of prayer, praise, hope and service. Grace is there for suffering and service; for prosperity and for poverty; for activity and adversity; for family and foes; for living and for dying. Grace and glory are in the place where Jesus died for me.

## **GENESIS 23**

### **AN ORDINARY LIFE**

Those who spend their time and money in the service of our Lord in whatever calling they have received, will find that in spite of what people may say and do, when a significant event in life occurs, they have the respect of others and a good reputation. A reputation that is above reproach is important. We are different from those who live for the momentary pleasures and benefits of the world.

Observers of our lives know that, and expect, those who live by faith to have a life that is unique because it is lived by scriptural principles.

Politeness in business exchanges was important even in ancient days. Even so, some things were said that were perhaps only a form of respect in order to get what a person wanted. If Abraham had taken the offer of the land for free, he would have insulted Ephron and likely the offer would have been taken back. Even more serious was that Abraham would have lost his reputation as man of faith in God. Instead of being a “mighty prince,” he would have been known as a covetous land-grabber.

There are times when flattery is used to gain some kind of advantage. It may be used for self-preservation or for material gain. Whenever one speaks to us with flattering words, we need to be aware that there is an ulterior motive behind the words. It may be, they want us to flatter them back to reinforce their self-image that may be kind of low. Whatever the reason, always respond with sincerity, dignity and give honor and respect when it can be honestly given. There are people who have such a low estimation of themselves, that they need some honest building up.

In the death of Sarah, we see the passing of a strong spiritual woman who was a major influence in the life of Isaac. It is possible to be very dependent on another person’s opinion of us to give us a sense of significance and purpose in life. Until we take responsibility for our own actions, we will be pretty much subject to the strongest personality and voice around us. In a sense, Isaac was always known as a son. He was the miracle son given by God through an aged mother who was beyond child-bearing age. He was the promised son to his father, who in a spiritual sense, died on an altar as he watched a ram take his place. After his mother died, his new wife, Rebekah, was brought into his mother Sarah’s tent.

We are all different people, and God can use each one of us as He chooses. He will take what we have in our own nature, to fulfill a work in the way He wants and where he wants. The promises of God hold true for every child of God because we have been “chosen in Christ.”

### **A BURYING PLACE**

Abraham had twenty-five years of uneventful living which he likely appreciated as an aged man. Home life and personal life were filled with the simple common things of daily living. He had news come from distant relatives he hadn’t seen for years. Then came death in the family as Sarah who he loved dearly for many years, died leaving grief and change behind. Then his son married a young woman he had never seen before. All of those things are part of most human lives, but it is how we take these events and deal with them that is important. That depends on how we live with God in the common affairs of life. Our reputation and consistency as neighbors and citizens, as well as family members, are a reflection on our personal faith in God.

**Death**, v.1-2. Isaac was forty years old when Sarah died. The death of Sarah is an account of the death of a believer and its effect on those around her. Her spiritual life was real and her faith was strong. When we read of her in the New Testament, she was one in spirit with Abraham her husband. Abraham and Sarah had shared a long life together. It appears that the only time their fellowship was marred was concerning the incident with Hagar. There is something very fulfilling in the fellowship of a husband and wife who are united in the Lord. That spiritual unity with Him, binds both of them together in a strong three-fold-cord with the Lord that is not easily broken.

The death of Sarah would have been a great loss to Isaac who was still living at home at forty years of age. His mother would have focused her love on the promised son of her old age. She would have devoted much of her efforts to him as the promised one. He was to carry on the promise God made to Abraham to the next generation and through that promise, all the world would be blessed. His sorrow at her death is specifically mentioned in chapter twenty-four.

A death in the home, leaves a place that can never be filled in the family. Others may come and take the position in the family unit, but that is different than the place that has been filled for a lifetime. The next person will fill the vacancy but will bring a different dimension and character to that position in the family. Activities can be resumed, but the one who has died is always missed.

**Sorrow**, v.2. Sorrow is inevitable in family life. How we choose to deal with sorrow depends on our faith in the sovereign will of God. We know death has passed upon all men, for all have sinned. The first mention of tears in the Bible is mentioned here, which is significant. A person who God has used for His purposes is not exempt from the wages of sin. In spite of the joy in life they have brought to many, their death brings sorrow. Those were genuine tears and a proper and expected expression of loss and grief at the passing of the wife Abraham loved.

**Duty**, v.3. If we allow sorrow to overwhelm us, there is danger of losing our credibility in our testimony of faith. Work is the best way to avoid allowing overmuch sorrow to stop us in the course of our life and responsibilities. One who sorrows, demonstrates their faith when in public by moving forward in life in spite of the inward pain of such significant loss.

Abraham knew the need of having a burial place where “his dead..., my dead..., thy dead,” could be properly remembered by him and those in his family of the next generations. Dignity and honor are important when a person is buried. A body is precious even though the person is gone from it, and it returns to dust until the time of resurrection. Respect, loving care for the visual remains of a person who lived among us in a body is expected, especially from loved ones.

**Faith**, v.4-18. Even though Abraham was a pilgrim and a stranger there, Abraham intended to stay in Canaan. He had left Ur for good, and knew Canaan was the place God intended him to be as well as his family after him. Sarah was to be buried there, not in Ur. The courtesy of Abraham toward those he lived among is a good example for us to follow when dealing with people we barely know.

We often will do business of one kind or another with people we don't know or know only by reputation. They may have heard of us but do not know us, except to know that we are Christians. Being a person of faith should increase our politeness, courtesy and manners toward others no matter who they are. Courtesy is one of the first and basic evidences of a true believer. People may be on their guard when dealing with us because they have heard, “He or she is a Christian. Watch out!”

In spite of what was offered to Abraham, he knew he needed to buy the land with no strings attached in order to “possess the land.” It is not really a good testimony of faith on our part to be looking for, or expecting, handouts. The “appearance” of a matter being dealt with is important. We are to abstain from all appearance of evil.

**Love**, v.19-20. Respect for the dead was paid and a lonely old man went home with his memories. The burying place was “made sure” as evidence of the respect and love Abraham had for his wife Sarah. When someone we love dies, there are appropriate ways believers in the Lord Jesus Christ should conduct themselves and the attitude we should have when others seek to console us in our loss.

Dignity, grace, gratitude and expressions of thankfulness for the memories of the person who died, and the interest of those who sympathize, are all in needed.

Love that has sorrow is natural, inevitable, personal, and can be a beautiful testimony to those looking on and wondering what to say or do. Bereavement would be unnatural if there was no sorrow. Such loss produces sorrow, but the best evidence of love is seen in dignified expressions of sorrow.

Faithful service calls us to move on with life and not be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. There are new areas of service for God and His people that open up to sorrowing saints. Others around sorrow with no hope. They may need silent comfort from one who knows recent sorrow personally. There will be others who need to be ministered to from the scriptures, and others in practical ways. Serving others will preserve one from self-pity, regrets and spending all of our thoughts, emotions and efforts in remembering one who is gone. There are areas of need to be filled by sorrowing saints.

Hope that blesses us and others is able to be expressed as we look forward to the resurrection, with the joy that faith gives. To say farewell to a most significant person with whom we shared life with its joys and sorrows for many years, is difficult. Faith upholds and strengthens the soul, and the assurance of the resurrection of the body is a comfort. Hope inspires us to “look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.” When our time comes to go, we will be able to look forward without fear and dread. We live and move through life guided and kept by the One who is “the Resurrection and the Life.”

## **GENESIS 24**

### **FAITH IN OLD AGE**

Isaac was a son born contrary to nature, mocked by his brother and offered up to God. He is like one brought back from the dead and because of him, the cause of controversy and disorder in the home of Abraham was cast out. He is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ who was miraculously conceived and born of a virgin. He was despised and rejected of men, even His own brothers. He was offered up and died on the cross for our sins as “the Lamb of God which carried away the sin of the world.” He rose from among the dead, is alive forevermore and is now waiting to come for His bride when it is fully ready to come to Him.

The oldest and chief servant of Abraham’s household was perhaps “Eliezer of Damascus.” He reminds us of the Holy Spirit, who along with those God uses in His service, is in the world today to seek the bride for our Lord Jesus Christ. The chief servant had a clear commission which was made impressively urgent when an oath was taken. The work of the Gospel today is very urgent. The bridegroom is waiting for the bride to be complete and ready for Him. Those who preach the Gospel do so under the authority and commission of our Lord. The Holy Spirit gives the power needed to make the message plain to those who are willing to hear. It is God who does the preparing of the hearts to receive the message personally. He directs His servants to the place and the time for those who are willing to hear to be faced with the choice of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. The Lord God “shall send His angel before thee.”

Provisions were needed for the long journey to suit the needs they would have. There were jewels and precious things to be gathered to present to the prospective bride, but there were also the basic things needed for survival and for the overall purpose of the journey. Time and effort in the work of the Lord is necessary before the message of the Gospel is presented. Preparation of mind, heart and body as well as material needs have to take place before saying anything of significance to those who will be

listening. The message of the Gospel is ours to present, and God will save those who respond in repentance and faith in His word preached. The word of God opens the heart to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our hearts are prepared by making specific prayer requests so we can discern the guidance of the Lord in the endeavors before us.

True service begins with prayer that reveals to us the will of the Lord. Physical efforts are necessary to prepare in a practical way for God to work through us. Prayer prepares us to be ready to act on what God opens up before us. It is our privilege to tell others of our Master and His glory. We must also tell them of the Master's interest in them. When we have done our part, it is up to the one called by the Gospel, to respond. "I will go" is what we always hope to hear when the Person and work of Christ has been presented to the one whom the Spirit of God has convicted. His great work is to reveal Christ to the seeking soul.

The significance of the well, being the place to which Rebekah came, is quite obvious. Without water there can be no life. The water of the world has to be continually drawn because it does not completely satisfy the need. People have to go the water over and over and over again. Our Lord Jesus and His word, is the well of springing water that gives everlasting life to those who come to Him. Thirsty souls will find our Lord near every person who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness. At the well is where Rebekah first heard about Isaac. Jacob and Moses both found their brides by a well.

Understanding is a well of life to those who have it according to Proverbs 10:11. Grace, and all it brings to us, is like a well of springing water. When a person's soul is thirsty, it is a well of the water of the word to which we can come daily to draw. Those who come are never sent away empty. By the water of life which we can take of freely, we find the Guide, the Holy Spirit, who leads us to a land that is fairer than day. Such pure water as that which comes from the Spirit of God, satisfies the thirst after righteousness that fills our soul.

The servant of Abraham put precious jewels on Rebekah which would remind us of all that faith provides for us. The meek and quiet spirit, the ministry of service that is acceptable to God, praise, thanksgiving and worship, are all precious things we have been given as the Spirit of God dispenses His gifts to God's people. All those things identified Rebekah as one God wanted to bless, but she had a personal choice to make.

She first had to be willing to identify herself as having no claim on anything from Isaac. She was an object of love who has a little foretaste of all that was before her, if she was willing to go with the servant. We can get a foretaste of eternal blessings in the everyday course of life which we know we do not deserve or have any claim on. God demonstrated His love for us in giving His own Son to die for us, and in numerous other ways since the time we first trusted in Him. Rebekah did not reject the servant nor take his gifts for granted. She ran to tell others in her family who she had met and who he represented. It is possible to tell others about God's grace and not be a partaker of it.

After the errand was explained, when Rebekah said, "I will go," in spite of her family's desire to have her wait, she stepped forward in faith in the words of the servant, and was immediately a partaker of the blessings that were yet to be revealed to her. She had a beautiful garment and gifts that were hers, because she simply believed his word, and in spite of what is common to most people, she went out in

faith. She believed the words of a man she had never met before, and went to a place she had never been before, to marry a man she had never seen before.

This is how it is with those God brings into His family today. We hear his word and decide whether it is true. When we realize it is factual and based on the solid evidence of all the gifts we have already received, we believe on the Person. The word of God gives us the faithful words that we believe, which leads us to put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who having not seen we love. His word is enough for us to know both the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. That begins our new life, our eternal life, with God. The life of faith will soon bring us to where we will see Him.

If it is after death's day, we will see Him through the sight of soul and spirit that have been anointed with heavenly eye-salve. If we are alive when the Lord comes to take his bride to Himself, our physical eyesight and spiritual eyesight will be one, in our changed bodies. To look upon our Lord Jesus by faith or by sight will not change the fact that we were confronted by Him at the well of truth. It was there we had the opportunity to accept Him and His offer of grace. The foretaste of heavenly treasures are already ours and we love Him without seeing Him. We know Him, we value Him, we appreciate Him for who He is – our Savior, our Redeemer. Our Lord!

In a coming day, the bride of Christ composed of all believers in this day of grace, will be presented to Him as a spotless bride who has travelled across the desert of the world to the place where she sees our Lord in the air. Then we shall be forever with the Lord. The comfort of those words is enough to motivate us to be unspotted by this ungodly world.

### **WINDING DOWN**

A calm peaceful spirit in a person of old age has a unique beauty. That beauty shines from the expressions in the wrinkled face and the brightness of ancient eyes that have seen a lot on the journey of life. White hair can be a “crown of glory” if the person beneath it has been conscious of the presence of the Lord on the journey. The closing years of the life of Abraham seen much more tranquil than the earlier years.

### **Crowning Experiences**

In chapter twenty-four we learn of Abraham's enjoyment of Divine Blessing, v.1. “The Lord blessed Abraham in all things.” His life is summed up in those few words. The Lord made him rich and He still “makes rich and adds no sorrow with it.” In his old age his faith was undiminished and he was faithful to the Divine Will, v.2-4. He knew God was going to perpetuate his seed and he was concerned that Isaac would marry a woman who had the same beliefs and background instead of being involved in the idolatry around him in Canaan. This is an important principle to follow today. “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

Another benefit of old age is that there is insight into Divine Purposes, v.5-6, that is not common to those who are young in the faith. A long journey is in order, if it is done to fulfill the purposes of God. To be aware of God's will that must be done is possible and is our expected commitment when we know it is according to God's purposes. A sense of Divine Favor, v. 7-9 that is keen in old age, helps us admit openly we do not deserve the least of God's mercies and the wonderful favors He has showered upon us. We have learned that when God wants us to forward in faith to do what He has in mind for us, then it is incumbent on us to get right at it.

If it involves high cost, so be it. If it means we are to take a long journey, get ready and go. If it means we will be uncomfortable, bear it so that we can honestly say, “Thy will be done.” If it means we will be misunderstood and criticized, that is the normal course in the service of God. What we are physically unable to do ourselves, the Lord will guide us to other capable people who are willing to do what we cannot do. In chapter twenty-five we will find two more characteristics of old age: **Closing Events and Characteristic Elements.**

### **THE MODEL SERVANT**

When there are things to be done, we will need to be willing to delegate to others things that are more than we can deal with. Some characteristics we need to be able to see in them, assure us that the responsibility is in trustworthy hands. Any servant of God should review our own self and life to see if God can trust us with an important errand for Him.

**Intelligent Obedience,** v.1-9. We look for a person who is ready to work and do what is required, with a sense of obligation as well as looking at service as a privilege. Intelligent service involves careful thought regarding the obstacles that may be faced, the points to focus on and any contingencies that might unexpectedly arise. Inquiries are a sign of good sense, good planning and willingness to know and obey instructions. Commitment to the task needs to be made articulate and obvious.

**Zealous Interest,** v.10-14. To not delay in preparation and taking action, indicates a personal interest and awareness of the importance of a matter. To “delight to do Thy will” were words from Jehovah’s Perfect Servant, Jesus. How much more should it be ours! To pray a specific prayer, to put emphasis on the Master rather than on ourselves as His servants, is evidence of our interest in the right Person.

**Gracious Tact,** v.15-33. The servant was courteous in a very becoming way because his attitude was a reflection on his master. Our manners and manner of conduct are very important in any service we do for the Lord. What could be good and profitable, can be spoiled by lack of courtesy and consideration. Patience is not pushy, but remains quietly watchful while the other person or persons think about what is said and what is at stake. Silence in such times is more important than urging one to make a hasty decision.

The gifts without “strings attached” show sincerity and honesty in what is being presented. When God guides us this far in life, and guides us to do this thing in this place, then let us patiently wait for God to bring about His desired conclusion after we have aptly finished our part in the matter. The cause of the Lord, is more important than how quickly we accomplish the work.

**Loving Faithfulness,** v.34-49. Wisdom, faithfulness and patience characterize one who knows the importance of what he has been called to do. Humility and dignity spoken with quiet integrity as one speaks to others about our Lord, makes listeners conscious of what he is like because of what we are like. The objective of the message is clear. The Lord wants people to come to Him. The proposal offers a definite choice to be made. The decision to accept or reject, the invitation is then left to the hearer.

**Glad Success,** v.50-67. There will be difficulties. There will be some opposition. There will be the natural inclination to wait until later. But when it comes to the responsibility of the servant; our Lord’s business requires action and a definite conclusion. When the servant has delivered his message and concluded his charge – he disappears from view.

### **A REVIEW**

**The purpose of the father:** A bride for the son. “Even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.”



**The position of the son:** The heir, the promised seed, the one who has divine purposes to fulfill. The Son is head over all things to the church.

**The prospects of the bride:** She was thought about before she knew it. Arrangements were made to have the church “chosen in Him” before the foundation of the world.

**The proclamation of the servant:** He announced the father’s purpose. “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel... make disciples... baptize... teach.” The Spirit of God “will glorify Me... and tell it to you.”

**The power of the message:** Describe the son so one is attracted to him. Christ lifted up, draws all men to Himself.

**The progress of the soul:** A determination to go by faith alone. Rebekah believed and acted upon what the servant said, based on evidence she could see in the gifts. We believe the word of God, rest on the Lord by faith and find the solid foundation on which faith stands.

**The prospect of home:** A new home, a permanent home, and most importantly, a person who loves her because of who she is – meets her before she gets to the destination. When we come to Christ, He rejoices, gives eternal life, places us in the family of God and loves us. There is a rest for the people of God.

## **GENESIS 25**

### **CLOSING EVENTS**

The life of Abraham before the death of Sarah teaches us that faith embraces the truth of God in many different ways. Where we live, what work we do, how we respond to opinions of people, are taught as we go through the life of Abraham. What we should do when our brothers and sisters in Christ are in danger of making bad choices and choosing to associate with the wrong kind of people, are seen in the faith-life of Abraham. The promises of God were not questioned by him because of his faith in the all-wise God. How to wait with patience is also illustrated in this man’s life.

Abraham had embraced the covenant God made with him, and following his story, Isaac introduces us to a different kind of life. The life of sonship is unique because everything of value that he had and enjoyed, was his by inheritance. He had to learn the value of sonship and how to live before God in a whole different way from that of his father. As Abraham went into the final stage of his life, we learn of sons he had by Keturah. This took Abraham into an area of fruitfulness in which the practical truths of life and godliness were learned. He began his life with God by faith in God. The principles of practical truth do not come by the law (Hagar), or by promise (Sarah). The practice of divine truth in the lives of God’s people as the family of God, is a testimony to the value of each believer being an earthly representative of our Lord. The things we do are not what make us acceptable to God, but to those around us. Faith in Christ alone is what we need to be accepted in the Beloved. The conduct of the life of believers, reflects on the reality of our faith in day-by-day living.

### **Characteristics of Abraham**

**His faith** was evident from the time he first took God at His word in Ur of the Chaldees and was seen through the many dramatic events in his life. At the end of his life, he was still the man God blessed in everything he did. **His faithfulness** was openly seen and expressed in his words and deeds as he moved consistently through a variety of situations, and for the most part, he was notably faithful to his God. **His fear** of God and honest and open reverence for God was a testimony to kings and servants. He never lost godly fear or allowed it to become a casual attitude toward the God he trusted and loved.

His fellowship with God led him through spiritual experiences with God personally that allowed him to have actual friendship with God. Even God Himself recognized Abraham as a friend.

### **The biblical record of Abraham**

The Old Testament record of Abraham includes fourteen chapters, indicating the importance of the man to us. The lessons the Holy Spirit wants us to learn from the account of his life and walk, are important. He entered into a covenant with God and God actually said, "I am the God of Abraham..." God spoke to Israel generations later and used the blessings He gave to Abraham as an example for His faithfulness to them. Moses and Elijah both prayed basing their prayers on the relationship God had with Abraham. Abraham is the only person recorded in the Old Testament who had the honor and privilege of being called "My friend," by God Himself. How I long for God to be able to say of me. "I am the God of Gaius!"

In the New Testament we read of Abraham's seed being the Messiah who would redeem Israel. His relation to the Jews was spoken of by both the Jews and the Lord Jesus. Four times he is mentioned in the Gospels and each time there is a different aspect of spiritual life that was the focus of the passage. A whole chapter in the book of Romans, teaches the subject of righteousness by faith, not works. His spiritual seed is considered in Galatians and his life of faith is illustrated in Hebrews eleven.

True life that is intended for us, has a number of important parts to it that can be learned through flowing God's dealings with Abraham. Life's greatest privilege is to be associated with God. God lifts us out of a life of sin and places us where He chooses, so that we are able to fulfill His divine will. Life's most solid foundation is that a covenant has been made with those who put their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved in making our life meaningful, strong, peaceful and satisfying. The greatest glory in life that we can give to God is faithfulness to Him. Sincerity is far more important than success. Goodness is of much more value than the glory of man and holiness is more important than honor. "Well done" from our Lord has far greater worth than the praise of men.

A person who is consistent, humble and earnest in a life lived to the praise of God, cannot be compared in any way to a world-centered life. The secret to living a full and successful life is to live by faith. Trusting God, believing His word and resting on His promises, will bring satisfaction and joy to us. Receiving the blessings from God gratefully, responding with thanks, relying on Him in every situation, rejoicing in the Lord, reproducing the character of God and hopefully glimpses of the life of God, brings joy to our Lord. The degree of our faith in Him will guide and give purpose to all we do. Simple faith embraces each day and uses the blessings of daily life to bring honor and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The passing of Abraham**

When Abraham died, the spirit of faith and the truth to which it was joined by the outward evidence of his life, now passes in the historical account to the inward spirit of sonship in Isaac. We have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and now is added to faith, knowledge and understanding. Our faith is in Christ, but we add to faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. We become children of God by faith in Jesus Christ, and now as responsible sons and daughters of God, we live "the life of vision" which is what "Lahai-Roi" means. When we drink from the water of this well, our spiritual vision is enlarged.

For Abraham, Bethel – the place of worship, and Hebron – the place of fellowship, were a great blessing. He was blessed to eat of bread and wine from Melchizedek, the king/priest of Salem where there was peace. Beersheba was the well of the oath and the covenant blessings received there were real to Abraham. At the well of “the life of vision,” Beer-Lahai-roi, is where we live in the good of things not seen. This is where the pure in heart see God and the hidden things of God.

Abraham, the man of faith, was richly blessed and matured to where “the Lord blessed him in everything he did.” Isaac, the promised son, move us on to the spiritual blessing that are unseen by almost everyone. Keturah’s sons by Abraham were given practical things that are associated with life, but by the time of the following generations, those things had deteriorated into form. Later, there was open opposition to divine sonship and truth.

### **AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHARACTER STUDY OF ABRAHAM.**

Abraham: father of (many) a multitude.

#### **Ancestry:**

- Descendant of Shem, 1Chr.1:24-27.
- Son of Terah, Gen.11:26
- First named Abram (“exalted father”), Gen.11:27.
- A native of Ur, Gen.11:28, 31.
- Pagan ancestors, Jos.24:2.
- Marries Sari, Gen.11:29.

#### **Wanderings:**

- Goes to Haran, Gen.11:31.
- Receives God’s call, Gen.12:1-3; Acts 7:2-4.
- Prompted by faith, Heb.11:8.
- Enters Canaan; Canaan promised to him by God, Gen.12:1-7.
- Dwells at Bethel, Gen.12:8.
- Famine sends him to Egypt, Gen.12:10-20.
- Returns to Canaan enriched, Gen.13:1-5.
- Chooses Hebron rather than strife, Gen.13:6-12.

#### **Testing and victory of Abraham:**

- Separates from Lot, Gen.13:8-12.
- Rescues Lot. Gen.14:14-16.
- Receives a blessing from Melchisedek, Gen.14:18-20.
- His covenant with God renewed; a son promised, Gen.15:1-2.
- Justified by faith, Gen.15:6; Rom.4:3.
- Takes Hagar as a concubine, Gen.16:1-4.
- Ishmael is born, Gen.16:5-16.
- His covenant with God renewed again; he is named “Abraham: father of (many) a multitude.” Gen.17:1-8.
- His household is circumcised, Gen.17:9-14, 23-27.
- Promised a son, Gen.17:15-19.
- Covenant in Isaac, not Ishmael, Gen.17:20-22; Gal.4:22-31.
- Receives messengers, Gen.18:1-15.

- Intercedes concerning Sodom, Gen.18:16-33.
- Witnesses Sodom's doom, Gen.19:27-28.
- His faith delivers Lot, Gen.19:29.
- Sojourns at Gerar; deceives Abimelech, Gen.20:1-18.
- Isaac is born and is circumcised, Gen.21:1-8.
- Sends Hagar and Ishmael away, Gen.21:9-21.
- Makes a covenant with Abimelech, Gen.21:22-34.
- Testing of Abraham in the offering of Isaac, Gen.22:1-19.
- Receives news about Nahor, Gen.22:20-24.
- Buys a burial place for Sarah, Gen.23:1-20.
- Secures a wife for Isaac, Gen.24:1-67.
- Married Keturah; has other children; dies, Gen.25:1-10.

#### **Characteristics of Abraham:**

- Friend of God, 2Chr.20:7.
- Obedient, Gen.22:1-18.
- Tithed, Gen.14:20; Heb.7:1-4.
- Generous, Gen.13:8-9.
- Courageous, Gen.14:13-16.
- Independent, Gen.14:21-23.
- Man of prayer, Gen.18:23-33.
- Man of faith, Gen.15:6.
- Rich man, Gen.13:2.
- Mighty prince, Gen.23:5-6.
- Good provider, Gen.25:5-6.

#### **References to Abraham in the New Testament:**

- In the line of faith, Heb.11:8-10, 17-19; Acts 7:2-8. Abraham followed God's leading into an unknown territory – the promised land.
- Christ, the true seed of Abraham, Mat.1:1,2,17; Lu.3:23-24. Jesus Christ was human; born in the line of Abraham, the father of the nation through which the world would be blessed.
- The father of the Jewish nation, Mat.3:9; Lu.3:8; Acts 13:26; Rom.4:1;11:1; 2Cor.11:22; Heb.6:13-14. God established a nation to tell the world about Him. He began with an old childless man of faith and did the impossible through him.
- Foresees Christ's day, Jn.8:56.
- Hears the Gospel preached, Gal.3:8.
- Justified by faith, Rom.4:1-12; Gal.3:6-9, 14-29; Heb.11:8,17-19; Jas.2:21-24. Abraham showed faith in times of testing and disappointment. God called him His "friend" because of his faith.
- Faith of Abraham seen in his works, Jas.2:21-23.
- Faith of true believers exemplified in Abraham, Mat.8:11; Rom.4:11-25
- Abraham sees the eternal city, Heb.11:8-10, 13-16.
- God's covenant with Abraham still valid, Lu.1:55,72,73; Acts 3:25; Mat.22:32; Mk.12:26; Lu.20:37; Acts 7:17-18,32; Rom.9:6-8; Gal.3:6,14-16; Heb.6:13-15. Those who like Abraham, choose the life of faith, are alive with God. We can always trust the promises of God even

though they seem too incredible to believe. Abraham is the father of all those who come to God by faith.

- Sons of Abraham illustrate law and grace, Gal.4:22-31.
- The tithes of Abraham have a deeper meaning than just the giving of money, Heb.7:9-10.
- The headship of Abraham in his marriage, 1Pe.3:6-7.
- Eternal home of Abraham is in heaven, Lu.16:19-25;13:29; Mat.8:11. Because of his faith, Abraham is now enjoying his reward in the kingdom of God.

#### **Contrasts:**

- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with Lot, Ishmael and Esau.
- The first three “died in faith, confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth.”
- “Just Lot” – “faithful Abraham”; “righteous Lot” – “Abraham, the friend of God.”
- Their wives: Sarah, “judged Him faithful that promised”; Lot’s wife: “remember Lot’s wife.” Sarah, A figure of the New Covenant, the heavenly Jerusalem – Lot’s wife, a beacon to all who “put their hand to the plow and look back” and are unfit for the kingdom of God.
- Abram felt it was important that God’s family live in peace. The “Canaanite and Perizzite” must not see discord between brethren. Lot saw the well-watered plain of Jordan.
- Abram dwelt in the safety of the high ground. The low ground was open to attack, even in walled cities.
- Even after captivity, Lot went back to the city while Abram maintained his pilgrim character.
- Lot ends up hiding in a cave. Abraham in his old age is a prince of God among the people.
- Lot never did rejoin Abraham once he left. He forsook the altar that was always by Abraham’s tent. He lost his family; he lost the respect of men. Abraham looked for a city, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

#### **Lessons:**

- We are blessed because of the faith of those who have gone before us.
- We can trust God to do, what is impossible to us and for us.
- We have a promised eternity with God because of faith in Christ.
- Even though God’s promises may seem too incredible to believe, we can trust God to keep all He has promised.
- Those who follow God even when we don’t know what is ahead, will never be disappointed.
- We are accepted by God on the basis of faith alone, not faith and something else.
- The promises God made to Abraham in regards to righteousness, are the same to us. We are made righteous by God because of faith in Him.

#### **ISAAC**

In the narrative of the patriarchs, Abraham is no longer a testimony to faith in his flesh. Faith is changed from an outward form. “Show me your faith by your works, into unseen evidence as Isaac takes leadership as the promised son. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Isaac possesses all the riches of unseen faith, but even that kind of faith has to be tested. For twenty years Rebekah is barren. Isaac desires a son to perpetuate the promise, but in his case, as in ours, God’s love sometimes withholds our desire for a purpose greater than ours.

Delays test our patience if we only consider them to be delays. We need to consider them to be times of learning and rest in which we are made aware of our own inability and God’s sufficient grace, when

we are in the quietness of His presence. That often opens to us like a breath of fresh air, a joy that focuses on our God, and the springs of joy give us spiritual strength in spite of our weakness.

Isaac was perhaps comparing his own barrenness with the proliferating seed of Ishmael. There were no delays in Ishmael family as far as children being born. The flesh can quickly bring fruitfulness in our souls but it is not always good fruit. Anger, envy, falsehood all come hastily through our flesh and can soon become uncontrollable. Grace in the inner man that waits for God's timing, will often cause the flesh to jump ahead with great activity which we think will please God. If it is done in the energy of the flesh, a big flurry of "spiritual activity," may lead to opposition against that which is of the Spirit of God. Christendom is rampant with activity, but one wonders how much of it is of the flesh and how much is guided by the Holy Spirit.

Barrenness can cause grief and when it is removed, it can cause a lot of grief in other ways. We must rely on the promises of God to maintain spiritual balance in our lives. We are to "take up the cross" and follow our Lord, not go our own way. When we are near the cross, we are humbled and there we find our resources in our Lord and Savior. Spiritual truth should always be a living and active life-principle that shows itself in outward ways. Waiting on the Lord may not be dramatic or even known by others, but God knows and we know, that God will reveal His power and purpose when He knows we are in a spiritual condition to receive it.

God's truth as it relates to sonship and consistent life in the family of God, enables us to learn more of what the new life we have means and what it contains. We are not always prone to rest in faith without some activity to make us feel we are useful. After the period of waiting, before long we realize God has been working in us all the time. Spiritual seed has produced life within our soul and spirit.

Two new lives appear in the narrative giving us the insight to know that personhood and character traits are in a child even before they are born. Even though Esau and Jacob were twins, there were essential differences in them while in Rebekah's womb. The struggles between them began before birth. The flesh and the spirit of a person will always be at odds with each other. Only one can have the ascendancy and that is not always the one who comes first. The carnal mind is at enmity with God and with the spiritual mind.

Esau, the twin who was born first, was favored by Isaac. He must have been outwardly manly and openly lovable and attractive in an earthly way. When a child has a gregarious personality when they are young, they are able to grab the attention they seek and become the focus of attention. Young children thrive on that and parents and relatives often are drawn to such a personality. As one gets older, that kind of attention seeking becomes offensive and people begin to back away from that narcissistic personality, and would rather see some humility.

Jacob, "a plain man," was laid-back, apparently quiet in nature, while within him was a sly and calculating mind. He was waiting for the time to take advantage of another person for his own purposes without being out in the open about it. "Dwelling in tents" meant that he would be a favorite of his mother, sort of like we call, "a mother's boy," and had learned to cook and do household things that most young boys avoid. The vigorous activity of Esau, with the hunger that goes with that, provided Jacob the opportunity he was looking for. He would likely have been told by Rebekah that he

would have the leadership in the family, and perhaps was seeking a way to usurp the authority of being the leader.

The birthright in ancient families was a very coveted and honorable position to have. The occasion Jacob had waited for was a circumstance in which he could take advantage to further his own plans. The lentils that slowly grow and are cooked slowly are patiently cared for, provides no dramatic story behind it like a hunt for wild game. The slow growth of plants that provide healthy food can truly satisfy the need of hunger, which a failed hunting trip can't. Even though the taste of lentils is bland, when hunger is strong, "every bitter thing is sweet."

Underneath the demand for food that Esau had, was a deeper problem. He "despised his birthright." It didn't seem to mean anything to him because he was living for the moment, not looking into the future. Contempt for the blessings and promises of God is characteristic of the flesh. Momentary pleasure and present satisfaction are more important than coming glory. Love for the Lord, fellowship with God's people and all that is associated in a walk with the Lord, to the flesh is not important.

Isaac loved Esau and would want to bless the firstborn son. Even though we live in the spirit, we still love the flesh and its momentary gratification can claim our attention to the detriment of our spiritual wellbeing. Too many of God's people are willing to settle for the meat that perishes rather than the steady diet of nourishing spiritual food that strengthens and maintains spiritual vigor and purpose in our lives. We learn from the steady supply of "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little," and that is what remains with us. Not everything that is important is available to us in a short time. The birthright is of no importance to one who only lives for the moment. Its value will be evident in a future day when glory will be seen.

Esau is spoken of by Paul in Romans nine as a type and proof of Israel's fall. The failure of the law to provide redemption is obvious. The law tells us what is wrong rather than how to make what is wrong, right before God. Sinners need to know the One who is the Redeemer from the curse of the law. He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

## **GENESIS 26**

### **THE SPIRIT OF SONSHIP**

When we begin our Christian life, our spiritual understanding is based on simple faith passed on from trusted instructors who helped us get the meaning of what the scriptures teach. As we read the Bible for ourselves, we gradually find that the Spirit of God opens our own understanding of the word of God. The more we read the Bible, the more light we get from it, that guides our minds, guards our conduct, gives us a more Christ-like attitude and grants us goals toward which we reach so that life is purposeful.

By learning from God, we realize we are sons and daughters of God who wants us to be the best we can be in His service and in our lives. We may be inclined to make changes in our lives when difficulties bring unexpected challenges to our expectations as new believers. Faith is still there, but it is when we realize who we are and that God does not always remove difficulties or move us away from them, that we can become more fruitful by faith that is stronger than the challenges it faces.

Dryness and “dearth in the land” can parch our souls if we are expecting abundant spiritual rain and the dew from heaven all the time. When dry times comes, wait for God to speak before taking action. To be walking with the world can make us unaware of the presence of the Lord. Isaac got off course and went to the edge of the worldly system and was at the far edge of the land of promise. Natural inclination and human knowledge influenced by worldly wisdom, can leave us without a word from the Lord.

Isaac was blessed when the Lord appeared to him and kept him from going farther away. He was also blessed and preserved, when God’s grace moved Abimelech to look out his window and see that Rebekah was Isaac’s wife, not his sister. God blessed him even further by giving abundant returns from the seed he had sown and water in the wells he dug. But the real blessing came when he returned to Beersheba where he belonged. It is when we are by “the well of the oath,” that we have peace.

God’s people are in danger of not hearing the voice of God if they go beyond the borders of separation from the world. We may not realize what is happening to us at first. Holy joy gradually fades into a false sense of security and contentment. Many believers live in that condition all of their lives. Not very far away are those who are ready to take advantage of one who God has blessed, or to oppose with hidden hatred and selective strife. The spirit of sonship in God’s people is an ongoing relationship that has to be guarded and nourished. The growth to maturity and daily spiritual advancement doesn’t happen all at once, and it is not stopped all at once. Being conscious of who we are, where we are and who we belong to, is necessary to successful Christian living and sonship. When we yield to God’s grace in everything, we will find ourselves where God intends us to be.

### **ISAAC, THE ORDINARY MAN**

Isaac was a very ordinary man who was the son of a great father. He lived a quiet, normal and peaceful life without a lot of drama or great activity. He was a successful man in his own right, who avoided confrontation as much as possible. This ordinary man was also the father of a great son. An ordinary life is an “ordered” life.

During the course of his life, there were bright spots and some dark times. It is in those dark times we need God’s grace and mercy. When he went to the wrong place for the wrong reason, he was put in a position where he believed a lie was the best way to maintain his life as he knew it. But sin brings discipline. We learn from this chapter how difficult times should be faced and what to do when facing a situation in which we fear for our lives. Some things that happen to us, need to be faced and dealt with, and we should walk away from other things.

**Divine Guidance**, v.1-5. Famine of one kind or another will arise in our lives, the same as in other generations before us. How we respond to difficulties in life is often motivated by how those who lived before us acted in their difficult times. That way is not always appropriate. To follow Abraham’s journey to Egypt was not the way God intends us to deal with barrenness in our lives. Abraham went there on his own initiative and there were lasting consequences as a result of that choice. The Lord intervened in Isaac’s plan to go to Egypt and preserved him from further difficulties.

When times of emergency arise, we are prone to act quickly rather than take the time necessary to consider the potential consequences of the action. What we do may be allowed by God to teach us



needed lessons. Egypt is not the promised land. There are dangers in the world to body and soul because all that is in the world appeals to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

It is essential that we establish guidelines and safeguards to keep us walking by faith rather than by sight. Whether Isaac was right or wrong in going as far as Gerar is not made plain to us in the text. What is plain is that it doesn't seem like he consulted with God before leaving where he was and going there.

To be sure of divine guidance in testing times, is of great importance to us today. To take action in the energy of the flesh can quickly lead us to a place where we should never be found. It is encouraging to note that the Lord God reaffirmed to Isaac the promise that He had made to Abraham. The instruction to remain in Canaan in spite of the famine, was a confirmation to Isaac that God remained the same and His promises were unchanging in spite of the circumstances in which he was found. This is an important lesson for every believer to remember, take to heart and live by.

**Human Sin**, v.6-11. Even though we may have personal dealings with God that confirms our faith, that doesn't mean we are victorious Christians. Gerar may have been sort of a half-way-house for Isaac. He had been told by God to go no farther and was then asked by the inhabitants of Gerar about Rebekah. It was then and there he told a deliberate lie to protect himself. Abraham had told a half-lie; Isaac told a deliberate one. Selfishness and cowardice are both deplorable and sinful. If we let fear take control of our minds, then our words and then our actions will soon follow that lead to a fall.

Human tendencies can be genetic it is true, but they do not have the power to control us. We are responsible to bring every thought into captivity, so that by controlling our thoughts, we are able to obey our Lord when difficulties move us toward human sin. It seems like Isaac's lie was believed by the people of Gerar for quite a while before Abimelech looked out of a window and saw Isaac and Rebekah behaving as husband and wife, not brother and sister. This Abimelech, like the one before him, knew what was acceptable and righteous and what was not.

When we are rebuked for our misbehavior by those who expect better things of us as Christians, the wise person will accept the rebuke as a reminder from God Himself through a human instrument. It is a sad moment when a child of God has to be rebuked by a man of the world. When those who look on the way we live, see us make a bad choice or take a wrong action, that becomes an excuse to them, for their own misbehavior. Thankfully, Abimelech took action to stop the harm before it went any farther.

**Divine Blessing**, v.12-17. In a wonderful example of grace on the part of Abimelech, Isaac was able to stay on in Gerar. He was able to use the land where he was to plant seed, and in grace, divine blessing brought a return of one hundred-fold in the harvest. That would have been an exceptional return as far as a harvest is concerned. It was obvious to Abimelech and that people of Gerar that God was with Isaac in spite of his sin.

The people of God often find that in spite of our failures and shortcoming, God honors His people in the sight of men. He deals with us privately in a chastening way to correct us as His children, but allows us to be a public testimony of His grace. Our Lord may not arrange to have us dishonored in public, but discipline and severe correction take place before full fellowship and sonship with Him are restored.

It is not hard to imagine why the “Philistines envied” Isaac. Their envy led them to fill up the wells Abraham had dug, that were essential to Isaac’s prosperity in harvesting a good crop and maintaining his herds. Their resentment was obviously to show Isaac that he was not the owner of the land as far as they were concerned. The necessity of water was such that wells more or less led to a legitimate claim on the property around them. Even Abimelech wasn’t happy about having Isaac nearby, so as a peace-loving man, Isaac moved, but not too far away.

Because our forebearers were people of faith and lived by faith, doesn’t mean we or our generation and the one following will have sufficient faith to leave close proximity to the world. Attraction to earthly success, power and pleasure can be very strong in those who are believers in Christ. To remain close “to the action,” is a real danger. It is a place that is inconsistent to the faith of a child of God to make their home as much like the world as possible. We are passing through this world as “strangers and pilgrims.”

**Human Patience**, v.18-22. The effect of staying too close to the world and the world system, means we will have to do over and over again, what could have been done once if we were far away. Isaac was reluctant to go too far and was met with strife and opposition. Even though he tried to be diplomatic to those who were around him, the difference between Isaac and them was obvious to them. They had to pressure him to leave or to conform. The peace-loving man, Isaac, yielded slowly and patiently to them. At the same time God was being patient with him. It took a while but finally he got back to where he belonged.

**Divine Favor**, v.23-33. When Isaac finally got the message, he went all the way to Beersheba. That was where God wanted him to be. The very first night he got there, the Lord appeared to him. He had finally got back to the place of divine favor after all the difficulties he had passed through. It was then he heard God say for the first time, “I am the God of Abraham...” He had nothing to fear when he was where God wanted him to be, doing what God wanted him to do.

When we are right with God, He reveals His truth and His grace to us. The covenant we have with Him, moves us to worship and serve Him like Isaac did when he built an altar at Beersheba. When we are in the path of God’s leading and are restored to full fellowship with Him, we are able to be consecrated to Him, to pray in confidence and are able to be true witnesses to those who know us. When God is first in our lives, we can be a testimony to others and things change for the right for us.

Abimelech and his military advisors went to Beersheba when they heard of, and recognized the reality of the standing Isaac had with the Lord. “The Lord is with you.” “When a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” When we are right with our Lord, God and men favor those who wait on Him. “Them that honor Me, I will honor; those that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.”

The secret of true living is that God comes first at all costs. He gave us a divine revelation of Christ dying for us on the cross and divine guidance is given to guide us into all truth and keep us safe in difficult times. Strength of character becomes evident when divine truth and divine life is personal to us. Moral living can be maintained because of what our fathers gave us. It is in the difficulties we become who we really are in our own character, not just an imitation of our forefathers. An easy life

that is simple and uncomplicated, is not a good way to train young people. Separation from the world cannot be overemphasized for a believer's spiritual health and welfare. Power to live for God comes when we are where God wants us. It is there we have a testimony that influences the world for Christ. We are "in the world," but not "of the world."

### **SPIRIT OF MEEKNESS**

Isaac was a man of a passive nature. Whether he was insulted by Ishmael, submissive to be bound on the altar or having a wife chosen for him by his father, he accepted whatever came to him in a quiet and morally strong way, all he had to endure.

Actually, Isaac is an example to us of what meekness really is like. In his meekness and strength of character, he became a man of power and might without a lot of fanfare. His success wasn't in the extraordinary things of life, but in how he lived an ordinary life like most people. He had some failures in his personal life and in his public life, but the general tenor of his life was to live "a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty." Isaac was not egocentric, and that led him to have strength of character that became stronger as the years passed. That unselfishness recommends and reflects on the grace of God.

Most of us live ordinary lives and can learn simple lessons from the simple things that cross our paths daily. When we make mistakes, confess and forsake them and correct whatever it was that led us to do them in the first place. When we have some successes in life, be wise enough to give God all the glory, because it is because of His mercy toward us we are not consumed. When given a place of authority and leadership, maintain a meekness that is evident to be power that is under control. When there are changes that can be made to make things better for others as well as yourself, make them quietly without a lot of comments or commotion. Let God be glorified in all that we do or say in our ordinary lives.

## **GENESIS 27**

### **GOD'S PROMISES vs HUMAN SCHEMES**

Abraham was a man of faith who followed God even when he didn't know where God would lead him. When we follow the Lord's leading in earthly things, we will find ourselves following Him in spiritual things. Isaac lived within the borders of Canaan in peace by wells of water, as a son who had a great heritage passed on to him by a great father. We as sons and daughters of God are heirs of promises that can keep us true and loyal to our Lord Jesus Christ as we live ordinary lives.

Jacob's life was very different from the life of Isaac his father. He claimed the right of the first-born by crafty acts and taking advantage of his brother's careless attitude toward his privileges. Esau's self-centered fleshly ways were quite different from Jacob's self-centered subtle ways. Isaac was not unaware of all that was happening in his household, and he knew well the differences in his two sons. His own personal inclination was to give Esau the right of the first-born, even if he had to by-pass what God had said. Esau lived for the momentary gratification of his flesh without considering the long-term results of his choices.

Even though we are sons and daughters of God, we often choose to do things our own way. We know what God's word says, but think this situation calls for us to take action without waiting on God. Some people think there are unique situations in which we need to act on our own immediately without

considering the consequences of the action. God has His own way of foiling our intentions to do His will our way, but it may result in costly results because of our sin and willfulness.

Jacob was young and eager to have the blessing of God, but none of the family seemed willing to wait for God to act according to his divine plans. Isaac failed in his plot. Rebekah succeeded in her scheme, but the cost was so great that she never saw Jacob again. Esau missed out on the blessing he wanted and Jacob had to flee for his life. In our service for God, it is possible for us to let our zeal override or even ignore God's directions. Chastening of one kind or another follows the sin of willfulness. Yet, in spite of all the failures, schemes and crafty plans, Jacob was blessed. The actions of the flesh have long-lasting effects, and those who sin will experience the discipline of God.

Carnal ways to serve God, have serious and lasting negative results. God is going to carry out His own good will, and He doesn't ask for us to insert our plans and opinions into what He does. The outcome of a matter will always be what God wants, but the effects of our interference may follow us and affect us for our lifetime.

The whole point of the biblical record of history and of human need and failure, is consolidated in this one chapter. This is not a pretty picture. Four different people in one family with different ways and personalities, are shown in a simple open portrayal of their character traits. It is a very sad picture of a family's life where there is deceit, partiality and jealousy.

This narrative does not make some moral point or particular lesson to us, because in the different scenes there are a lot of lessons for everyone. In particular, when jealousy, partiality and envy are allowed among those who profess to have faith in God, there will be sin and failure in life and testimony. The attitudes we have soon leads us to take actions. Those very actions can be a terrible exposé of failure in believers.

**Isaac, the father, plots,** v.1-4. There didn't seem to be any sign of Isaac's approaching death, and he lived forty more years after this scene took place. It seems like Isaac hurried and secretly decided to confer on Esau the blessing God had said would be on Jacob. Physical blindness may have had something to do with his reasoning behind what he wanted to do. It is not becoming to an older person to act hastily, let alone privately feast for personal gratification and take action in self-will. It leads us to sin and the consequences that follow. Isaac knew God intended Jacob to be the leader of the tribe. It appears that Isaac trying to somehow get around what God had planned and to follow the way of the world by the oldest son receiving the first-born's blessing.

Partiality and the desires of the flesh can lead us to sin. That in turn starts a whole chain of events that can't be stopped. Self-will is like setting a small fire that soon becomes a raging inferno that quickly gets bigger and then out of control. One thing follows another and goes beyond what was ever intended.

Esau, the worldly man, wanted later what he had despised earlier. He had treated the birthright with disdain and casually turned it over to Jacob to satisfy his immediate hunger. Involved with that casual rejection was an obvious disinterest, and disdain, for divine purposes. He knew what God had said, and even to marry an idolatrous woman, disqualified him from spiritual leadership. He just wanted to have

what he wanted, in his own way and in his own time. He realized the value of what he had lost when it was too late to get it back.

We can never regain what we lose by self-will and self-centeredness. There are consequences to every action we take that cannot be avoided. Plotting and scheming to try to get around divine principles and practices are foolish endeavors. It is incumbent on a child of God to know what the Bible says about a matter, to pray specifically about the circumstances surrounding it, to accept wise counsel concerning it, and to take the necessary time to evaluate the potential outcome, before taking any action. The decisions we make and the actions we take, may have an effect for good or bad on other people beside ourselves.

**Rebekah, the mother, plots,** v.5-17. Obviously, Isaac did not think Rebekah overheard his conversation with Esau when he asked for the savory meal that he liked so well. Blindness limited his natural vision and his secretive actions limited his spiritual vision. Rebekah knew God's intention was for Jacob to be the one through whom the promises of God to the world would be fulfilled. Her understanding of the issue was clear but for some reason she believed God was not able to do what He had promised without her help and interference. She believed something had to be done to prevent a wrong from being done.

Crisis times arise in our lives and we will have to risk being misunderstood and opposed by some people who do not have the understanding to know what God intends to be done. In those times we may think we need to take some action, and that may be, but we must be sure it is what God wants us to do. God has His own way to accomplish His purposes and if we are privileged to have a part in that, we can certainly be thankful. There is no justification in taking things into our own hands and doing things our own way without considering the divine guidance that God gives.

Rebekah's sin in this plot, was to think that God couldn't carry out His own plans without her. She knew what the Lord had said years before when the twins were born, but thought there was an emergency situation about which God knew nothing. God's will, is not dependent on the actions of an old man or his crafty wife. He does not require us to take things over to suit our will, but rather expects us to wait in patience for Him to act in His time. Rebekah was just as subtle and clever as Isaac and Esau.

Jacob on the other hand, wasn't immediately acquiescent to his mother's wishes because he knew his brother, and the risks that were involved. He also knew God has His way of dealing with deception. Rebekah thought the end justified the means so pushed ahead with her plans. Jacob was just afraid of the trouble that would result and he didn't want to get caught for carrying out a dishonest plan.

Sin has a way of controlling our minds and actions if we allow ourselves to doubt God. We lose the capacity to think clearly and get wrapped up in what we think should be done. It is important that we go to God and seek divine guidance in tense times or when we think things are going out of control. Guidance from the word of God will include the principles and practices of faith. The Holy Spirit will reveal truth to us that fits the need, and will instruct us in the way of truth. The "peace of God" will then assure us when we are in the right way doing the right thing.

**Jacob, the younger son's deception,** v.18-29. When Jacob's hesitancy to do what was wrong was overcome by the scheming objective, it didn't take long to do what was planned. The lie came easily to his lips and another one quickly followed. The deception promoted by lies was soon accomplished. Jacob was a victim of his mother's favoritism and love, but he was a guilty man in his own right.

We all have a conscience and know what is wrong when we choose to go our own way. Deception silences our conscience at times and a silent conscience doesn't keep us from going farther and farther astray from God's revealed will. We can usually find some excuse to justify doing what we know is wrong. The father's misguided plans, the mother's interference with God's work, and Jacob's willingness to go ahead and deceive his father with lies makes this whole family scene very dark.

Jacob received the blessing that God intended, but the circumstances around getting it cost everyone involved moral consequences. Jacob never saw Rebekah again. Esau wanted to kill Jacob. Jacob ended up being deceived by another deceiver who was more skilled at deception than he. The whole family was divided and were potentially at enmity with each other. Someone wrote: "Oh! what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive."

**Esau, the oldest son's defeat,** v.30-40. Isaac overreached his right by trying to divert God's will to suit his will. Rebekah was grieved by the women Esau married. Esau was a bitter, angry and defeated man. His willfulness and disdain for divine things, caught up with him. More than that, he had gone so far away from the ways of God, that he found no place of repentance in spite of his tears. His true character was exposed and he had gone beyond the point of no return.

The past is not able to be relived or the consequences changed. Some valuable things that are lost by carelessness or indifference, are never able to be recovered. The "what ifs" of life that we didn't take care of at the time, are lost permanently. There are lessons we can learn from our failures and the failures of others. Do not do evil, thinking that good might come from it. There are right ways and wrong ways to deal with the choices that are before us. Deception and fraud are always wrong. God doesn't come when we try to convert people to the truth by telling untruth ourselves. Righteousness of life and words should never be set aside for expediency.

Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, all found out that the words of the Bible are true: "Be sure your sin will find you out." The problem is also that one act of sin can follow you all of your life. To walk in the light of holy desire in the presence of God is our delight. To walk by the crafty devices of our own making, is sin and can bring long-lasting difficulties. When we give the Lord His right place in our lives, we will find out what life is supposed to be like. "A man's heart devises his ways, but the Lord directs his steps." Faith, prayer, confidence in God and obedience to God, will allow us to be in fellowship with Him when He carries out His divine purposes. That will enable us to live our lives for His glory.

## **GENESIS 28**

### **THE JOURNEY OF JACOB**

In Jacob's life, as in everyone who God saves, there is a beginning that is unforgettable in its impact on the rest of our life. Jacob was a deceiver and supplanter up until this time in the account of his life.

Then after traveling sixty miles or so away from home at Beersheba, he came to Luz. He had only an indirect connection with God through his parents, but there had been no personal dealings with the Lord and no relationship with the Lord. Then there was the first meeting with God personally. After that first meeting at Bethel, there were a whole series of events and revelations that revealed his character that over time changed him from the man he once was, to the man God wanted him to be. But there was a starting point with God in the life of Jacob and he never forgot it.

The testing and training of a child of God is not done in four years of training at a Bible school or seminary. At those schools, students learn what the professors had previously learned and then are paid to pass on to others. Scripturally gathered assemblies are unique in this way in that there is on-going “Christian Education” weekly for a lifetime. A class or two on the Lord’s Day; a public Gospel message is given at least once a week; prayer and Bible study at least once a week – all of these beside special times when there are more meetings for learning, give time to learn and assimilate the word of God. We learn God and the wisdom and grace that is needed in the life of a believer during the whole course of our lifetime.

We begin with God when He saves us from our sins and their consequences, by His grace. The things we learn from God are those positive things which reflect the Person of Christ. A lifetime of spiritual training from God is His way of preparing us for the future service that awaits us in the eternal future. By the grace of God, people like Jacob who have unattractive personality traits who we try to avoid if we can, are transformed into people in whom the triumphs of God’s grace can be seen. We will never know what some of God’s people have privately experienced through their lives, but we do know that a life of faith in God has a start. The journey of faith begins at our “Bethel,” where we meet God personally and respond in confession with our mouth, the Lord Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord.

### **BEFORE THE JOURNEY**

#### **Sent away, v.1-9**

Isaac accepted the fact that God had kept him from carrying out his plot to give Esau the blessing of the first-born. He realized Jacob was the heir of the promise God gave to Abraham. It would have seemed right to him for Jacob to get a wife from the same place Rebekah came from. True, Rebekah was the one who made the suggestion, but as the leader of the home, it was Isaac who made the decision for Jacob to go to Haran.

Then he blessed Jacob again as a patriarch would do, asking the blessing of “God Almighty” to be on Jacob who did not know the Lord personally. He prayed for Jacob that God would make him a fruitful man who would have children to occupy the land God promised Abraham. It is important for believing fathers to let their children hear their names in prayer to God. Awareness of the fact that there is a God who rules over the affairs of men, is often made real to children when they are young. Bible reading and audible prayer should be a part of the daily life of every Christian family.

Isaac lived for many years after these events, but there is no further record of anything Isaac said or did for the forty plus years he lived after Jacob left for Haran. Failure in one major area of life can make it necessary for one person to be set aside and others carry on the work of God. Isaac had made a deliberate attempt to circumvent the blessing from Jacob to Esau, and he should have known better. To try to change God’s plans to suit ours, and to satisfy our will, is a serious sin and is doomed to failure.

On the other hand, if one is called to live a quiet life out of sight and out of the limelight of public opinion, a person can still be used by God and can glorify God. Our bodies and spirits are His. Those who are unseen and overlooked may be those people whose quiet labor, calm spirit and unseen devotion, have an effect on bringing honor and glory to God. Their unrecognized faithfulness is as important to God and His kingdom work, as those who are out in the public and are actively engaged in public service.

Rebekah was no stranger to subterfuge. She may have learned that from her father and brother. When she learned what Esau's intent was after Jacob had received the blessing, her cleverness in making suggestions to get her way, led her to propose a scheme to get Jacob to safety from Esau's murderous intent. By telling Isaac how the women of Canaan Esau had married caused her grief, and suggesting Jacob get a wife from her family connections, she dealt with two troublesome matters.

It is not wrong to make plans for our future or that of our children, but we cannot know what might happen on the way or even the outcome. Shrewdness can be a problem if we take it too far and become dogmatic and stubborn. As far as Rebekah's plans, her favorite son would get an acceptable wife and she would hopefully have a daughter-in-law who would be a comfort to her in her old age. She couldn't see the future and did not know she would not see Jacob again. Her plans were in the framework of God's will, but the results were not likely what she had hoped for herself personally.

Rebekah was a very capable woman married to a quiet and peace-loving man. She had plans and projects like most ambitious and resourceful people who want to cover every base as they advance upward and onward. When people have that way about them, they take all the precautions they can, but there are always exceptions they had not considered. To think we are agents in control instead of servants under control, may bring bad consequences upon us. Those things could have been avoided if we had followed the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit.

Jacob seemed to have become quiet after the family uproar. He listened first to his mother and then with equal acceptance, he heeded his father's command to go to Haran. It would appear that when he left, all he knew was that he was to go there to find a wife. Likely all of them thought it wouldn't be too long of a stay in Haran before he found a wife and was back again. He probably thought Esau would have gotten over his anger and desire to kill him.

God can intervene in our lives in whatever way and time He chooses. There is no pattern that He follows, because He knows each one of us by name, personality, temperament and location. We may never know the importance of one incident in our life, nor the impact it will have on ourselves and others, when God chooses to get our attention and reveal Himself to us.

As far as Jacob was concerned when he left home, he was trying to avoid Esau's anger, and was going to Haran to get a wife. God had far greater plans for him beginning with a personal contact with this heir of divine promise. That started a whole chain of lessons Jacob learned through the rest of his lifetime, and that changed his life completely. Sometimes with us, small events are the most significant ones in our whole life and we didn't even know that when it happened.

Esau wanted to regain what he had lost by his careless and indifferent attitude toward God. Also, he wanted to regain some favor with Rebekah and Isaac, in a way that was acceptable to his heritage. So,



again he acted on his own in an attempt to get ahead of Jacob. He thought that by marrying a daughter of Ishmael, he would be more acceptable to his heritage and get the blessing he wanted. It didn't matter to him that Ishmael was not of the same genealogy or that Ishmael had been passed over as the divinely appointed heir of promise.

An unbeliever has no real concept of the value and power of spiritual life and spiritual realities. Some people try to do what believers do, hoping that will make them acceptable to God. At first it may seem a lot like the real thing. There may be outward evidence that appears to be the fruits of being born again. However, when something or someone seems like there is reality in their profession of faith, unless "old things" pass away and "all things become new," there is no reason to think the change is a work of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual and moral changes are part of the evidence of the new nature that is implanted in a child of God.

To renounce sin and follow our Lord Jesus Christ means a person has had an inward change of nature. It is one thing to conform to the ways and practices of God's people, and quite another to be a new creation in Christ Jesus. God has plans for every believer's life that are not furthered by our plans and schemes. Dignity, peace and power to live for God comes from God. When we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we will recognize what a privilege it is to be able to do what God wants. It is our duty and responsibility to know God's will and carry it out. God's ways are far higher than ours and we are wise when we ask God to reveal to us His will and way for us.

God desires for us to know His will and plans for our lives. It is up to us to trust Him and obey His word. God is faithful to us and will gladly guide us into all truth. When we are willing to do His will, He will reveal His will to us. Faith makes us willing before we actually know that might be. We will know what is right as we walk step by step in faith in Him. Not only that, we will gain insight and knowledge in the things of God, when we fear Him and walk with Him in the light.

**The Journey**, v.10-11. Jacob's journey to Harran to find a wife was very different from the journey Abraham's trusted servant made to get Rebekah. Jacob had no camels, no entourage, no companions and no servants to do his bidding. He was fleeing for his life and had been sent on his way by his father. He had said his farewell to his loving mother and likely by the time had gone fifty or sixty miles, his feet were really dragging and he would have been feeling sorry for himself. On that four-hundred-mile journey that lay before him he would have lots of time to review his life up until that time.

He had little to show for his subtle deceptive ways. He had the blessing of the birthright and the parting blessing of his father, and that was all he had – but that was all that counted. He also had the murderous animosity of his brother and the fear that all he wanted may never come to pass. Often when we are low in spirit and are at the bottom looking up, is the best place we can be. It is in that place and state of mind and heart, we are willing to call upon the name of the Lord.

When young people step out on their own, they quickly have to face up to the fact that things they had been used to, had been freely provided for by their parents. They are also away from parental protection and guidance, and life is harder than they had expected when you are totally responsible for yourself. To leave the safety and security of loved ones and friends, is a crisis time in the life of any person. Most young believers have to face this kind of experience when they step out in faith alone,

without anyone to prop them up. Sometimes they have no one to confide in for a long time, and if they are living a godly life, they begin to suffer persecution for their faith and commitment to live a separated life. The emotions during those times can overwhelm a child of God unless they have already committed themselves unreservedly to God. By establishing a godly pattern of living to which they are determined to stick to, they have the strength and power of God as the strong support they need, and the high tower of safety to which they can go.

**The Dream**, v.12. After several days of travel and meditation, Jacob's feet may have been dragging, but he may have come to the place in his mind and soul to be serious about God, himself and life. Solitude has a benefit to those who are not willing to get side-tracked by what other people write in books about God or the Bible. When we begin to focus on the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and are not concerned about what other people's opinions are, we are near the place God can get our undivided attention. Our own open heart will give the Holy Spirit the needed place to bring us to where we personally experience "God with us."

When he was on the high stony ground a few miles north of Jerusalem, Jacob lay down to rest with a stone beneath his head giving him some comfort to his back and neck. While he was sleeping, a stairway that reached from earth to heaven upon which angels were coming and going in both directions, gave his mind a new view of the universe in which he lived. He wasn't the center of this world-view. This gave him a view of things from God's eyes, and God Himself was the focal point of it all.

By taking the time to focus our thoughts and spiritual intelligence on God, a lot of unknown things are opened to our understanding. There is a great gulf between us and God. There is a way to go from our earthly condition to where God is. There is a gate to heaven that can be open or shut. Some are on the outside and some are on the inside. Spiritual activity is going on all around us all the time even though we may not be conscious of it all the time. There is a way open to communicate with God that is open to "whosoever will." The separation of our soul from God does not have to remain. God speaks in ways and words we can understand and has a plan for the life of those who believe in Him. There are different ways God speaks to different people, but "he that comes to God must believe that He is, and He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

**The Revelation**, v.13-15. The God of our fathers is the same God who wants to communicate with us. He reveals Himself as the same One and then expects us to believe on Him and listen to what He tells us. After God revealed Himself to Jacob, He gave a specific revelation about Jacob's future. The land he was lying on would be his and his seed after him. God promised to be with Him – Divine Presence; keep him- Divine Protection; bring him back to the promised land – Divine preservation; and would not leave Jacob until the promises were fulfilled – Divine Promises.

**The Response**, v.16-17. When Jacob was aroused from his sleep, he realized God was right where he was, even though he thought he was alone. God had become personal to him. His father and mother had taught him about God, but now he had come to know God himself. He was far away from home and going farther, but God and heaven were near him. Everything changed from being "of the earth, earthy," to being aware that where God is, is the house of God and the gate of heaven.

One who comes in repentance to God recognizing God is here and knows me, then experiences fear, awe, reverence and a sense of a whole new life being opened up before me. God is really Holy! I am nothing! God wants me personally in spite of who I am and has made a way for me to go to heaven through trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. The things of God become “holy and reverent!” The journey onward becomes entirely different with quickened steps and an enlightened heart.

**The Memorial**, v.16-17. Whether Jacob had gone back to sleep in peace and rest is not specifically stated, but it seems like he was well-rested when he rose in the morning and consecrated the stone pillow to God. We will remember with grateful hearts and thanksgiving the time God in mercy reached down to us and saved us by His grace. Faith is not long in showing evidence of reality when our hearts are knit to our Lord as we recall when we first came to know the Gracious Father and our Redeemer/Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Growth of spiritual character leads us to doing what is right and just as the word of God and the power of God enables us to live out our new life in Christ in obvious ways. God inspires us to do His will and we reject the works of sin-polluted actions. A new nature doesn't mean we no longer have a will of our own. It does mean that it will be our desire to please God and when we fail, we don't wait to confess our sins and forsake that which has taken away our joy in the Lord.

**The Vow**, v.20-22. This is the first vow we read of in the scriptures. Jacob knew his need of God and in a sense, makes his own audible and personal commitment to live a life of faith. A life lived because of grace that has been given to us, does not mean we are sinless and perfect. It means that “the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” The promise to give a tenth of all to God, is not a small thing when a person prospers. If we have very little, a tenth seems quite manageable, but a tenth of a million is a very large and daunting amount to consider giving to God.

### **LESSONS FROM THE LADDER**

This event in Jacob's life has a lot of lessons for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It teaches us much of the grace of God and reveals how willing and able He is to provide for us just what we need in spite of our sinful past. God's grace reaches down to us through the Lord Jesus Christ and He saves us by grace through faith in Him. In mercy and grace the Lord Jesus is “the ladder to heaven for me.” We know God through our Lord Jesus who was found in fashion as a man. All we are and have comes from God through Him. It is by faith we see Him and learn from Him. he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the one and only connection of heaven to earth and earth to heaven. He came down from heaven and has ascended into heaven. Our Lord Jesus told Nicodemus that no man has ascended up to heaven but He that came down from heaven. In other words, there is no self-made ladder of access to heaven. Jesus is the Only Way.

There is no other ladder like it because it unites the heavenly world of holiness and deity, with man on earth. It connects the eternal with the temporal. It rests on the earth defiled by human sin, and rises to the perfections of the throne of God. The One who is the Highest of the high and became the lowest of the low, makes possible the connection between us and God. He “suffered that He might bring us to God.” When a soul is awakened to the awfulness of sin, the grace of God becomes real when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

His eternal deity enables Him to connect with God on our behalf. His humanity which He took upon Himself, connects Him to us. In His sinless perfection as one “found in fashion as a man,” He is able to take our place, cancel our debt and bring us to God in a just way because He imputed His righteousness upon us. His suffering and death in our place, has canceled our debt. We are able to go to God because of His grace. As our substitute, he paid the debt of sin we owed so we can ascend to God because of that “Ladder” to heaven.

The “Ladder” also makes it possible for blessing to come down from heaven to us. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.” Our Lord Jesus is the One through whom our every need is supplied. “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Because of him who is our Mediator, Advocate and Intercessor, our prayers are heard in heaven and the answers come down from heaven. Through this “Ladder” our petitions rise to heaven in a moment and are made acceptable by Him.

As we mount up step by step on this “Ladder,” we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We go from grace to grace as our feet leave the dirt of earth behind and we ascend to our heavenly home. How thankful we are that we came to “Bethel” and learned that this “Ladder” is for our use. There is no ladder to hell. People are cast into hell. But as we ascend toward our heavenly home, we can see the face of God more clearly and hopefully will enjoy, while we are here, the journey upward, away from the darkness into the bright light of the perfect day.

If we find ourselves alone and wondering what is going to happen next, God meets us through His word and ministers to us in ways we can understand. His word reveals His character, His sovereign plans for us and what He has planned for the whole of His creation. His grace that is sufficient for all our needs, is freely provided for us to bring us through life and home to heaven. By His grace, He overrules our faults, failures, mistakes and forgives our sins. He may even use those chastening times to teach us to realize our limitations and our helplessness without Him.

Jacob learned that his schemes were as nothing when he realized how great God is for the first time. How wonderful it is that God is long-suffering in spite of the low level of spiritual life Jacob had. We don’t know much about God when we are first saved, but God, in patience, takes us despite our limitations, and reveals Himself to us a little bit at a time for our whole life.

God was long-suffering toward us before we were saved, and He certainly is afterward. Jacob only had a superficial knowledge of God before he got to Luz. Like God did with Jacob, He does with us and Luz becomes Bethel, “the house of God.” With patience, He stays with us through our spiritual infancy, and as we yield to His will, He helps us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and the truth found in the word of God. He sticks with us through times when we are confused and encourages us in times of spiritual growth. He doesn’t leave us nor does He forsake us. What He promises, He always does.

## **GENESIS 29 - 30**

### **JACOB BEGINS A NEW LIFE**

In the school of life there are a lot of things that can only be learned by experience. There are also things we knew that have to be unlearned. At Bethel, Jacob learned the Lord is near us when we are not aware of it. He learned that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and nothing is hidden

from God. By the grace of God, he met the Lord by faith, and a new life started for him. For the next forty years, he was in the training school of God, learning how to live by faith.

**A life of service begins.** The first area of service Jacob started was fourteen years of faithful service for Leah and Rachel. His own deception caught up with him when he was deceived by a better deceiver than he. The first reward, although he didn't consider that at first, was that Leah was fruitful and he had his first children by her. In a sense, his reward for service through Leah, was outward. The inward desires for emotional connection through his love for Rachel, was beyond tangible. Our affection for the truth and inward links with divine Persons are real in one who has been changed by God's grace. Fourteen years of faithful service brought the blessing of God in more ways than he thought. God has greater plans for us than we can conceive in our minds.

The second area of service in which Jacob was constrained to be, had to do with the actual tangible things of life. Flocks and herds were gained; the outward things that are important for living come as a result of doing God's will from the heart, faithfully day after day in a consistent and profitable way. Laban's condition was that of a deceitful man who wanted to take advantage of a man of new faith in God.

However, the influence of a Spirit-guided person that God uses, no matter how new in the faith that person may be, makes those around him or her conscious of a real difference in them and to a certain extent, people may be uncomfortable to be too close to one who lives "godly in Christ Jesus." Leah typifies the outward affections that are natural to people. Rachel shows us the principles associated with inward affections. We will embrace both, to a degree, but as a child of God matures spiritually, even though we are not completely rid of that which is of the flesh, our inward person longs to be more like Christ. A new creation in Christ Jesus is not really attracted to the natural interests of the world unless they continually grieve or quench the Spirit of God. Our new nature has spiritual desires that claim our hearts because we so appreciate being saved by God's grace. We will never find rest until we find it in Christ alone.

Love for Christ cannot be "affected" for long. When love is real, it shows. If it is mere "affectation," it will also show up to be only temporary. Real love has no time limits. Time doesn't affect it because it is above time and it even overcomes adversity. The light of love that is in us becomes brighter, the outward show, yields to the inward blessings of grace, mercy and love itself. God, in His faithful love to Jacob, went way beyond Jacob's limited love and desires, to give him fruitful love in Leah, inward affection to Rachel, and a spiritual love that passed the limitations of time.

The service of Jacob for Laban, for the flocks of unusual sheep and the herds of distinctly colored cattle, brought blessing to both Laban and Jacob. Jacob was where God wanted him to be, doing what God wanted him to do. When God is in control and we are willing to be guided by Him, even the outward, temporal things of life change so they don't look like they once did to the spiritual mind. The Spirit of life in Christ gives us a whole new outlook on the things of time and sense. Jacob served God and God gave the increase.

Fruitfulness in service for God may come in many different ways. Jacob had children from Leah, Rachel, and their bondmaids. Each one of those women was different in personality and characteristics, but they were all brought to life by the life-giving Spirit. The Spirit of God blesses our

own awareness of the differences in each person, although in everyone there are life principles. Some have lower principles for some reason and others live a life of higher principles. Leah's first four sons had quite a number of similarities of character according to the names they were given. Rachel's maid-servant's sons, had a whole different attitude. The same was true with Leah's maid-servant's sons. After that Leah's second group of children seemed to be different than the first ones. Finally, Rachel had children. Joseph's name means "increase" or addition."

If the only thing we get from our new life of faith is the fact of sonship, we miss the purpose of living and the power of God using us to bring fruitful service to Him. We are intended to apprehend that for which we have been apprehended by Christ. Our service for God as life passes, is both outward and inward. Both are valuable in God's eyes.

**The New Start**, v.1. With new hope in his heart, Jacob left Bethel, likely with quickened steps that were anxious to know how God would lead him. The long journey would not seem so long now because of the revelation of God to him. The assurance of God with him would be like a light to his soul. He was like a newly saved person who "goes on their way rejoicing." When we are enjoying our salvation and are in fellowship with God, the long journey of life doesn't seem so long.

**The Meeting**, v.2-14. Jacob first met shepherds from Haran who were waiting to water their flocks. That is like so many who are influenced by the peer pressure of those around, to put off what needs to be done now. Then Jacob met Rachel! That changed everything! In his desire to be alone with her, his comment to the other shepherds was basically, "Why are you here waiting around instead of out feeding your flocks?" With alacrity and God-given strength, Jacob moved that heavy stone himself and watered the sheep of Laban for Rachel. She, in turn, ran to tell her father of the young man from far away.

When faith begins to become real to us, we will find many open doors before us as God moves us forward in His service. While others may wait and wonder what to do, those who live by faith, act in faith and claim the opportunities God opens up before us. Faith in God after He saves us brings other wonderful life experiences, events, and people into our lives. There will be people who come into our lives who are a delight to us and with whom we can share the common bond of life and faith.

**Faithful Service**, v.15-20. Faithful service for God, motivated by true love, is a wonder for all to behold who know that love is the prime mover in a believer's life. "The love of Christ constrains us." Time passes rapidly when love urges us onward. Love doesn't really count time. Rather, it is that which promotes our hope and joy to be involved in faithful service. The longer it lives and labors, the stronger it gets.

**Bitter Disappointment**, v.21-30. Jacob, the past deceiver, was outsmarted by a greater deceiver than he. Jacob's love for Rachel was real, so when the wedding night was over, his disappointment was real. However, there are times when our disappointments are God's appointments. Before the lengthy marriage feasting was over, Jacob had two wives. He was being disciplined in the school of God in ways he never imagined. God was abundantly fulfilling His promises through His divine arrangement of things. God was also making Jacob conscious of the value of him learning to do the truth, as well as speak the truth. Past failures and attitudes do have a way of exposing our sinful nature.

Conversion begins a process of training that includes valley experiences as well as mountain-top experiences. The deep valleys of disappointment are needed to balance our nature and lead us on to maturity. The groans of disappointment make the glory of highlights so much brighter! The important matters of life are not in what we profess, but in how they develop our conduct and character. We need to ask ourselves, “Am I living out what I profess to be? Am I producing in my life what God intends, or am I a fraud?”

The providence of God takes an ordinary journey in life, and opens it up to a whole new vista and way of living. Small things seem important, and what may have started out as being rather mundane, become life-imparting opportunities. A chance meeting with an unknown person, a small request, a “teaching moment,” all become of major significance according to the providence of God. Ordinary circumstances lead to an extraordinary life.

The combination of circumstances that connect harmoniously, and are guided by the wisdom and will of God, brings peace to our souls. The blessings, joy and cheer of living for God, can be experienced every day to those who serve Him out of a true and willing heart.

The justice of God may surprise us as we consider the principle that whatever we sow, we reap. But how wonderful it is when we realize that, even though a deceiver is deceived, and the schemer is out-schemed; in God’s school, this is for our learning and our good.

In those times, the sufferings caused, are corrected by holy discipline that is not punishment. When we are chastened and trained, it is the wisest move we can make, to yield ourselves into the hands of the One who can make us a new and useful vessel out of marred clay. When the weakness is finally dealt with, we can be trusted with the blessings God wants us to have, even though we never expected them.

### **THE DISCIPLINES OF LIFE**

**At Home.** Jacob had a lot to learn at Haran about himself and other people. The deception in Laban’s home life was soon evident in Jacob’s home life. Having more than one wife was tolerated but it did not make life happy, because God’s intention has always been one man and one woman for life as the ideal. What began in Laban’s home, envy and jealousy, continued when two sisters were married to the same man. Both sisters had the same spirit about them so righteousness and holiness were not often seen by the children. Then add two more women to the mix, and there was likely constant turmoil in Jacob’s home.

Domestic happiness doesn’t come automatically, and the “happy ever after” idea is usually only in story books. It is God who makes the difference in that it is possible to live like “heaven on earth.” It is God who answers prayers; God who gives life and God who can change domestic tragedy into blessing. The principle of sowing and reaping what we sow, cannot be avoided, and long-lasting consequences will occur. When the home is not full of peace and evidence of real love, there cannot be a real good witness for God or even an attitude of helpfulness toward others in the family.

**At Work.** When Joseph was born, Jacob seemed to come to a turning point in his life. He had a desire to go home to the promised land, likely to make things right as best he could, and then go forward into the rest of his life and live it the way God intended.

He had enough of deception and subtilities. He wanted to get on with life without the constant underhandedness of Laban, and the increasingly critical comments of his brothers-in-law as well as the dark looks of his father-in-law. His sons were old enough to take some responsibility for the business of raising cattle and sheep. Jacob, in spite of his new nature, plotted and planned his retaliation for unfairness and was very successful at it. Jacob was still a crafty man and clever man, so he was at the mountains of Gilead before Laban even caught up with him.

In mercy, God was able and willing to help His servant Jacob go where He wanted him to go without any apparent obstacles. When God wants us to make a significant move in life, the principle to follow is, “As you go step by step, the way shall open up before you.” Our plans are not always God’s plans. Instead of the Messiah coming through Rachel, Jacob’s first love, He was to come through Judah, Leah’s son. God’s disciplines in life bring much greater benefits than our own plans. What we want may be good, but what we need may be better, and God knows what is best. The ways of God with us, deal with our needs, not necessarily with our wants.

Laban had learned from Jacob’s significant testimony the Lord was who had blessed Jacob with prosperity. He was an unbeliever, but he seemed to appreciate, or at least recognize the value of his association with Jacob. People often see and admire the testimony of the people of God, but they don’t want to admit to their need for God themselves. They want the social and business advantages of interfacing with Christians at church or in social settings, but they don’t want God interfering in their lives and the way they choose to live.

**A Downfall.** Jacob was a different man since he had met God at Bethel, but he was still Jacob. He was deceived by Laban many times in the twenty years he served him, but he also stooped to deception himself. He made himself rich at the expense of Laban. If all we saw was the human side of things, those events would leave a lot of questions in our minds as to the reality of Jacob’s faith in God – but the same could be said of us!

God’s view was that of patient waiting, of disciplining Jacob, leading him, and overruling his sins! How patient and merciful God is with us too! In spite of all the mistakes and failures we have, God is still working on us to bring us into the right way, for His purposes, not our own self-seeking ambitions. God is, has been, and will be, long-suffering with us. We dare not take Him for granted because whom the Lord loves, He chastens and forms us into what He wants one way or another.

## **GENESIS 31**

### **THE JOURNEY BACK**

Between the time of escaping from the consequences of his deception, and going back to that same place, the many experiences of life through which Jacob passed, changed him. The same things happen to us. Instead of fear, the grace that saved us through faith keeps us free from being paralyzed by fear. When we come to Christ and put our faith in Him as our Redeemer and Savior, we receive the Spirit of love, truth, hope and a new nature. Even though many normal human experiences happen: marriage, parenthood, business and labor take place in us the same as in other people, we now see God’s hand guiding us as we yield to Jesus Christ as our Lord.



Dangers, threats, and opposition that may lead to hardships, all prove to be life-changing spiritual experiences that can be for our good as we move forward toward spiritual maturity. By nature, we have a strong tendency to control people and events in our lives for our benefit at the expense of others. We will not likely even recognize that our self-centered motives are sinful. Recognizing and facing self-centered motivation becomes painful to us when we admit to who we are and what is wrong in us. However, that awareness is the first step back to a wholesome and blessed fellowship with God that changes every aspect and outlook we have on our life and service.

God's power is made evident in our weakness. Jacob had nothing when he arrived in Haran. Even though he was treated deceptively and unfairly by Laban and likely his sons, God's power was not limited by their unfairness. God's ability to meet Jacob's needs and lead him to success as a result of his hard labor, was obvious to those in Laban's household. Jacob had wives and children, he had become rich in livestock, and all his material needs were met. If we ever have a tendency to be jealous of the success of others, we have two choices. We can allow jealousy to have its way with us, and it will eat away at us like a disease until we are constantly unhappy with everything. Or, we can "rejoice with them that do rejoice." When that happens, we choose to find joy in the success of others and that will keep us from sinning, lift our own spirit, and keep us sweet in soul as we interact with those who have been entrusted with what we have not been trusted.

Of interest to those who compare scripture with scripture, are the events that happened in Jacob's life when he left Padanaram, and the events that happened to the children of Israel when they left Egyptian bondage four hundred years later. Hostility arose against them both because of their strength and fruitfulness. God-given ability made them people to be feared by those who were unbelievers. They were both poverty-stricken when they went into bondage, but when they left bondage, they were wealthy. They both had to cross great waters that separated them from those who were against them. God intervened in both cases to keep them safe from those who had previously controlled them.

These same things happen to believers who are willing to "come out from among them and be ye separate, says the Lord," in this day and age. When we yield the controlling interest of our lives to our Lord, He takes care of us, preserves us, empowers us and makes us fruitful in the things that are important. He leads us to the place in life where He knows we should be in order to flourish in holy things.

### **THE DEPARTURE**

To "Set our affection on things above, not on things of the earth," will give us an appropriate response to all the world system throws against us. Much happens in the world that will keep us down in despair with unnecessary burdens if we look at them and even participate in them. We are able to have a sense of fulfillment when we submit to kingdom principles as taught by our Lord, rather than the practices and principles of the world system. Unfortunately, believers have the inclination to want to be like the people around, and want what people who have no faith in God want, if we allow our thoughts to see, hear, taste and then touch them. It is then we are in danger of acting upon those things that appeal to our sinful nature and lose touch with God.

The inward man needs to be daily renewed, and then we will be able to overcome those vile attractions that give us spiritual misery. When God made us a new creation in Christ, that included the desire for the "sincere milk of the word to nourish us," and the "strong meat" to strengthen us and make us wise.

The light of truth being known and practiced to the best of our apprehension, brings light and life to our soul and spirit. We have a sure hope in dark times. We have a meaningful life when all around us, people flounder from one disappointment to another. We have abundant life while others barely find a reason to live.

Laban knew what was real and important when he saw it in his son-in-law, Jacob, but he remained unchanged in himself and died as he lived back in Mesopotamia. He didn't hurt Jacob and Jacob didn't hurt him, but they both went different ways when they parted. The older man, Laban, went back poorer, although he had greatly benefitted from the twenty-one years of Jacob's servitude when he was close to Jacob. Jacob went the opposite way back to Bethel, made rich by his labor as an indentured servant, insightful by his experiences with God in normal life, and aware of heavenly things and the reality of God with him.

Anger will stop those who are blessed by God, from seeking God and like Laban, leaves people abandoned on "the shores of the cast-away." Strangers and pilgrims who go for the better land God promised, and the rich pasturelands of the "mountains of Gilead," will find God has already been there with His bountiful rain and all the blessings associated with being back at the place God wants us to be.

"This world is a wilderness wide." Even though Jacob had fled that place over twenty years before, God had changed him and he returned to the same place and found it a place of bounty and blessing. What a joy new life gives us, even when we are in the same place we were before God saved us!

### **GOING HOME!**

Separation from the world begins in the heart. It goes beyond just physical separation and a hankering to see loved ones, to where we want to get to the place where we can live at peace with God and with people. This cannot happen to a believer who has close ties to the world. In this narrative, God enforced the desire of Jacob's heart and guided him to do what was right in the eyes of God.

**A Crisis,** v.1-3. Jacob's prosperity was evident and jealousy on the part of others, "upped the bottom." Laban was crafty and so was Jacob, but Laban's sons exaggerated their charge against Jacob. In times like this, we can trust God to intervene and we should consciously "make our requests known unto God." What God promises when we get our marching orders from Him, is what will definitely happen.

**A Consultation,** v.4-16. To consult with others who are either involved or affected by what we plan, is very important. Involved people have a right to know what we plan to do. They may not understand all that it means to us to do a certain thing, but they have a right to make comments and suggestions. Often other people, like Leah and Rachel, have their own issues that we need to deal with and take into consideration. They need to be consulted as to what we plan, and how our plans fit with their needs and plans. It may be surprising how much insight others can give us in regard to the whole matter, by them giving a wider picture of what is to come.

**A Flight,** v.17-21. When a matter is decided, initiative and prompt action are definitely in order. Don't wait "to bury your dead" or for a more convenient season to act on divine direction. Don't worry too much about what other people may think when you know what God has assured you of. It is what God wants us to do that is important.

**A Pursuit**, v.22-24. Opposition, even from a superior force behind it than we have at our disposal, is no match for God who is far stronger than both forces. “If God be for us, who can be against us.” Even though we have character flaws like Jacob, right and truth are with us when we are walking in the light with our Lord. The powers of darkness are not satisfied with what is right and true. They just want what they want and are determined to get it no matter what it might mean. Be thankful that “Our God is able to deliver us.”

**A Charge**, v.25-35. A false charge and an attitude of injured innocence are only evidences of hypocrisy and exaggeration. Unreal or excessive expressions of love and concern are worthless words when many missed opportunities in the past would have shown this to be in reality, a pity-party. It is what we do for people when they are with us and have the opportunity, not our expressions of kindness and love after they are gone, that counts.

**A Vindication**, v.36-42. Jacob had opportunity to vindicate himself as he answered Laban’s charges. Laban didn’t challenge his statements so he must have had to admit, at least to some degree, that his charges were unjust. God will support and defend us against wrong in His way and time. We may not always need to, nor should we, seek to vindicate ourselves. Sometimes silence is the best answer. But when it is the right time and we need to do this, trust God to give the right words to say and the best way to say it – and don’t say too much!

**A Covenant**, v. 43-55. The heap of stones Jacob and Laban made simply meant, “a witness.” “Mizpah” indicated the Lord saw the whole scene. The word, “Mizpah,” basically meant at that time and situation, “I don’t trust you, keep away, I am warning you.” Application by many today of the word “Mizpah,” is trust, union and fellowship. Even spiritual people can misapply scriptures to make a point.

The will of God in daily life may lead us to an inward desire and outward circumstances to make a move of some kind. Things may happen that initiate an inward unrest until that inward desire and outward circumstance, and most importantly, divine guidance, opens the way before us. The conviction of the Holy Spirit, the clear teaching of the principles and doctrines of the word of God, and an open door before us, will allow the “meek” to be guided in judgment and the “meek” to be taught His way.

When we acknowledge God in daily life, we will realize that the secrets of a consecrated life are to acknowledge God’s presence and power to shape our objective into that which is right in His eyes and suits our capacity to accomplish. The outcome may not be what we had wanted or hoped for, but it is God’s will that is important. God has His ways of stopping us if He chooses to, and to ignore those stop signs will lead to tragedy and disappointments.

It is a blessed life when we experience the providence of God in daily life. In the narrative of this action in the life of Jacob and his family, we can see God moving, shaping, overruling and even making the wrath of man to praise Him. Sin and free-will are often hard to deal with in life because our human nature and its tendencies want its way, even when we know what God’s word says. Each person has been given the right to choose whether we want to do God’s will or our own. God’s providence means He knows the results before the events even take place. When we rest on that fact,

we can have a quiet spirit in times of confusion around us, the rest of faith, when all is uncertain and the assurance that the providence of God will produce the best possible result when we are totally yielded to God's will.

## **GENESIS 32**

### **PREPARING TO MEET ESAU**

The disciplines needed for a child of God to live for God in the way God intends, do not happen all at once but over the process of time. We learn from both the good and bad things that happen in our lives, that God is still working on us to build and strengthen our character, capability and capacity to fulfill His plans for us. Sometimes a discipline happens quickly as in a crisis time. That may be a short and powerfully impacting experience or moment when God changes us in some way. Other times there is a turning point that may take longer, but the overall direction of our life is changed. Then there are the on-going daily disciplines of living for the Lord by faith each day. we may not even realize how important they are or even know they are happening, but our Gracious Father does as He molds us more and more into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The conflict of our human nature and the grace of God at work in us, is on-going. To the degree we allow God to control and work His will in and through us, His grace will overcome our own self-centered nature. When grace is at work in us daily, we are moved to be walking in the Spirit and not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. These are lessons we can learn from the turning points in the life of Jacob.

**The God Connection.** In spite of Jacob's fear, and perhaps because of it, God had arranged to have an escort of angels meet Jacob as he drew near to the time of meeting with Esau. When the angels of God are dispatched to do a work for God, we know something important and out of the ordinary is just ahead. Jacob had his camp of earthly possessions, and now he learned that God has His camp of heavenly hosts there as well. No wonder he called the name of that place where the angels of God met him, "Mahanaim" (Two Camps).

Jacob had lived a more or less peaceful life and soon he was to meet his brother Esau who "lived by the sword [27:40]." Jacob had struggled all his life to prevail over obstacles, but in that place his first recorded prayer since he left Bethel is made so we can read and understand his heart and his fears. When we are earnest and sincere in our prayer as we think of what is before us in life, we too are moved to confess before the Lord, "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast shown Thy servant."

There will be opposition from various sources when a believer in Christ is set apart for God. Sanctification is not a mere decision we make, but it includes our attitude of heart, our sincere and serious commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ in spite of what others may do or say, and our acts of service for our Lord. Jacob had opposition from Laban and then potential opposition was coming toward him from Esau and four hundred armed men.

Before Jacob met God at Bethel, he didn't fear or court the favor of Esau. Now he is in dreadful fear because he knows his own weakness. God's strength is made perfect when we are weak. When we are governed by the power of the flesh, our spirit cannot control it. When we confess and truly admit to

our weakness, our spirit is made strong and we learn that in order to have God's power on our behalf, we must be powerless in our own strength.

When God says, "I will do you good," do I really believe He means it? Will He do me good without me being in control of the situation? Of course, the answer is "Yes," but there is a price to pay. To have God's strength working on our behalf, we must lose our own self-centered strength. Our flesh will resist, but because of perseverance with God, our resistant flesh will be crippled to remind us of our limitations, who we are and who we serve.

**Wrestling with God.** In this narrative, after all that had gone on before with Jacob, he is left alone with God. As he wrestled with God he could not prevail, but in spite of that he would not let go. God showed Jacob, He could disable him, but Jacob's persistence led to blessing from God. He was never the same after that in body or soul. His name, "Jacob," had to do with his dealings with human beings. His new name, "Israel," had to do with his dealings with God. His life was spared by God and surely if God spared his life, Esau would.

God can change our character as well as our lives when we surrender to Him. We are still the same persons, with the same natural tendencies, but under divine guidance and sincere responses to God's will, we can develop a new Christian character that allows us to please our Lord. Courtesy and humility go a long way toward reconciliation. Fear can be overcome when we cast our burden upon the Lord. Persistence in faith, develops a strong character to meet the challenges of tough times.

**Messengers from God,** v.1-2. Jacob had left one area of difficulty when he left Haran and Laban, and then he moved into another when a confrontation with Esau was about to take place. It is assuring as we move through life, to know that God is aware of all that has happened, and all that will happen to us. "The angels of God met him," and Jacob had proof that what would happen, was under the control of his sovereign God. God had come to him at Bethel, at Haran and now He meets him again.

Angels are "ministering spirits" to the people of God. Our Lord dispatches them to meet the needs of those He loves. Little children, orphans, widows and all who know their helplessness, are not without divine concern for their well-being. We may or may not recognize them or the fact of their ministering service on our behalf, but they are "God's host." God's heavenly hosts are there to protect God's people in whom He has invested so much. Jacob had his earthly host of possessions that had been given to him by God. At Mahanaim the heavenly hosts were there to preserve the earthly host in a crisis time.

**Messengers of men,** v.3-6. God's messengers were there to assure Jacob of God's promise. For some reason, Jacob had not learned how to trust God when making connections with opposition. He knew peace had to be made between him and Esau, but his groveling humiliation was much different than genuine repentance. We often experience and learn important lessons when we are in God's presence, and are strengthened and blessed, but when we are facing a crisis, we may forget the assurances we received from the Lord. It is then we are in danger of taking actions that come from our own opinions and natural inclinations. That leads us to think we can and must, face this problem on our own initiative, without God guiding us in the way He chooses.

There was not one word of friendly greeting from Esau who was coming to meet Jacob with four hundred armed men. There was no evidence of a desire for reconciliation on Esau's part. Twenty years of separation apparently had not changed anything as far as Esau was concerned. Whatever was Esau's motive to come on without one sign of wanting to reconcile with Jacob, it had the effect of making Jacob fear, so that he again schemed and planned the way he had always done in the past.

God's grace does not always have the effect of eliminating the negative effects of our old natural self. We have the potential of rising above the fear of man that brings a snare, and the same natural inclination to take matters of concern into our own hands. However, free-will is still a human prerogative and we need to be willing to submit ourselves to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit when crisis times arise. Also, we need to remember that our Lord speaks to us in His word so that we are not left to speculate on what is the right or wrong way to face an immediate, potential conflict.

Yielding to God, places us in a position of active faith that allows us to simply trust in the Lord and lean not on our own understanding. When that happens, the proofs of God's assurance of grace given when grace is needed, lays hold of our inner spiritual life and shows itself outwardly in our attitude and actions.

**Fear of man**, v.7-8. Fear and distress of heart may happen to us as it did to Jacob when he seemed to be convinced of Esau's hostility and that the past had not been forgotten or overlooked. Casting our care upon the Lord is what is needed, rather than planning our way of dealing with issues. Jacob was not finding his peace and assurance in God, even though God had promised him that good was ahead. He must have forgotten both God and the angels who were with him. What fear we have when all we see is opposition, rather than trust in the living God!

**Fear of God**, v.9-12. When we call upon the Lord with the attitude of, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" we will find that He has been with us all the time. Jacob's prayer was real, but his faith was only partial. Still, his faith was clear as far as it went and he was true to God in remembering His promises and commands. We may be consciously aware of God with us, and yet doubt the outcome of a matter because it isn't what we expect. It is important for us to know that God will fulfill His promises to us and for us to keep His word in our heart. Let us never forget the Lord and put confidence in the flesh.

Humility in prayer and an acknowledgement of our own unworthiness of the least of His mercies, will move us to expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving as God works in our soul and spirit. Earnest entreaty is never out of order when we have fear and long for assurance and deliverance from evil. Jacob had a tender heart toward his family and knew the promise of God that his seed would be as the sand of the sea, and through it the world would be blessed. When God promises something, will He not do it? Often seemingly fruitless years spiritually discourage us, yet God is still working on us to direct, purify and deepen our souls and faith in Him.

**Dread of man**, v.17-19. Even after praying in which we cast ourselves and our burdens on the Lord, we are sometimes prone to pick them up again. This is when we look on the object of our fear, rather than on the Object of our faith. Jacob took things into his own hands again and inundated Esau with expensive presents, hoping to break down any hostility by doing things his way.

Instead of letting God do what is needed and guiding us into what he intends from us in a matter, to take matters into our own hands will leave us wondering if we have done enough. We will likely be concerned if what we have done or given will even be accepted. When we trust in the Lord, He will lift us up above all the tensions and fears we have, when we reach to “the Rock that is higher than I.” That is where real safety is found and our fears are able to be calmed.

**Distrust of God**, v.20-23. Careful preparation on our own without the leading of the Lord is unwarranted. It was unwarranted before Esau appeared, and even though Jacob had prayed, he did not trust God to do what needed to be done. To seek God’s wisdom and trust Him for that, is one thing. To ask God’s blessing on our own wisdom is quite another.

Jacob had to come to an end of himself and his own scheme before blessing could be granted. God’s provision comes just when it is needed. The angels came at the right time to the right place. God comes Himself to assure us that when the need is there, He will not forsake us. God’s provision comes just as it is needed. His provision is always timely and appropriate. He knows our needs far more than we do. His grace is always sufficient to suit our need. Whatever the need might be, God knows what it is and how to supply what is needed.

God’s provision should remove the fear of man. Like Jacob, we know God can do what is needed, but when we don’t fully trust Him, we will still have fear. We are to commit our way to Him and we are also to trust wholly in Him. The grace of God can be a reality in our daily lives when we trust Him completely. God’s provision doesn’t need our schemes that may even be sinful. There are things for which we are responsible, but anxiety and doubt are the wrong attitudes for believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. Plans and prayers can go well together when one is trusting in the Lord with real faith. When our hearts and minds are instinctively focused on God, He will reveal our part in the matter. He will give us the courage and power to go forward without fear to fulfill the commitments we make. A calm and restful spirit will demonstrate the reality of our faith. It is then we will experience the fact that God is “all and in all,” not just in a factual way, but in a personal way in our lives.

**Human Solitude**, v.24. At crisis times in our lives, it is our greatest wisdom to wait on God, rather than work our own willful ways. In the darkness of the night when we are alone with God, things ahead of us can be clarified by spiritual enlightenment and insight, instead of being determined that our plans are what is important in the circumstances that surround us.

**Divine Discipline**, v.24. It is in times like that when we become most conscious of divine intervention in our lives. When we come to an end of ourselves even as believers, divine grace is able to be experienced and it becomes real to us.

**Human Opposition**, v.25. At first, we may resist and struggle against what is obvious, but at our extremity, when we cling to the Lord, we will find what we need comes from Him in spite of our initial resistance. When we surrender our will to Him, God doesn’t leave us but blesses us.

**Divine Power**, v.25. God’s mercy and grace are what we need in times of testing and fear. His love allows us to struggle until we yield to the sweetness and fullness of divine grace. When that happens, divine power does for us what we could never do until we are helplessly weak. God’s touch of power changes us, and it also deals with our need fully.

**Human Helplessness**, v.26. The futility of human effort is not easy to accept. In spite of ourselves and what we know of our God, we still find it hard to give up the struggle and “let go and let God.” We lose what we struggle for. We gain what we trust God for. Trust God, yield to Him and put Him first.

**Divine Blessing**, v.27-29. We will be blessed even when our flesh is crippled. There will be given power with men when we receive power from God. Then new understanding comes and God can trust us with new and important experiences in our life and service for Him.

**Human Gratitude**, v.30. When we meet God in crisis times, learn from Him as to who He really is and what He wants to do through us, then we can meet opposition without fear. We will find we can face emergencies and look beyond them into the future with confidence in God.

**Divine Glory**, v.31-32. When sunshine enters our soul, God’s love, mercy, patience and wisdom are revealed to us and sometimes in us. God is glorified and He is magnified through our soul and revealed to others. When we please God, our character is changed because of our fellowship with God and the transforming influence of God at work in us. There is also power to live for God each day as we move forward in faith into the unknown events ahead of us. Spiritual blessing enables us to rise above our own resourcefulness, cleverness and ambition to where we become a peaceful, graceful and grateful person. It is then we can enjoy union and communion with the Lord.

Jacob’s hard servitude in Haran had ended, and his homeland with its blessings and hopes was just before him. But there were difficulties in front of him as well. Esau was coming toward him with four hundred armed men. Fear gripped Jacob’s heart and he was humbled before God as he confessed his unworthiness of God’s grace. In meekness and faith, he claimed the gracious promises of God as his only hope.

Then God appeared as a man and a spiritual conflict takes place. Jacob cannot win, but he will not let go. In faith, he held on in supplication and earnest tears. Earnest prayer moves the heart of God and to deny answering such supplication would be to deny His own words of promise. “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us, and if He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.”

When one’s heart is strong in faith and prayer, hardness of heart goes away. The heart becomes soft and tender as God ministers to us by His marvelous grace that works wonders. “Great is your faith, be it as you will.” However, in such wondrous events of spiritual heights and insights, we are not free from self-exaltation and self-esteem that can quickly lead us into acting in sinful, feeble, fleshly ways. Jacob was blessed and received a new name at Peniel, but that didn’t remove his tendency to “lean on his own understanding.” When we find ourselves on the high ground of fellowship with God, it is then we must openly and deliberately express to the Lord our trust in Him and willingness to do what He desires. Our sinful nature would want to plan a course of action to follow of our own design that we wrongfully think would meet the difficulties lying before us.

## **GENESIS 33**



## **JACOB AND ESAU MEET**

The tensions increased as Jacob saw a small army of men coming toward him and surrounding Esau. His planning didn't give him the assurance he needed. His prayer was sincere but unless faith is real when we pray, doubts can still arise and we wonder, "Is God able to deliver me?" Wrestling and the resulting blessing as well as a permanent limp indicating the weakness of the flesh, can have both a positive and negative effect, depending on how we respond to the Lord Himself. The flocks and herds Jacob gave as a gift were all out of sight. Now there was only Jacob's family and himself before Esau.

There are times in life when in spite of all the preparations we have made and all the efforts we have put forth to accomplish a goal, have done all they can do, that we are left alone as the only defense between those we love dearly, the Lord's people, and the potential disaster that sin and self-will can bring. It is then reality sets in and trust in God alone is our only hope for a successful outcome of a matter. To be humble and courteous in the face of opposition is a good attitude to have if it is sincere and from the heart.

In fear Jacob bowed low before Esau as he would before a king. Esau, on the other hand, ran to him and embraced him as a brother. God had been at work in Esau as well as Jacob. The relief of reconciliation was genuine on the part of both Jacob and Esau. Perhaps it was time that had healed the wounds of bitterness. It may have been the extravagant gift that softened Esau's heart a bit. But really, it was God at work in both of them that brought about the final result. The gifts may have been intended at first as a bribe to try to buy reconciliation. Perhaps it was a token of affection from one brother to another in spite of their differences. Or, it may have been some custom in the Middle East at that time that was practiced to clear the way for peace between one tribal group to live near another.

Whatever it was is not really made clear, but we know that when wrongs are made right, or conflicts are settled between brethren, the ultimate outcome is the work of God. Peace-makers are blessed by God. The open and humble attitude of those who want peace, opens the way for the God of peace to let the peace of God rule in our hearts. When that happens, we are truly thankful for the work of God on our behalf.

Jacob was now willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of those he loved, cared for and for whom he was responsible. This is the attitude of one whose heart is knit to those he loves and has been given the role of leadership to be carried out by the principles God has given in His word. When we are actually in crisis times, not merely facing them, we are then given the needed courage, wisdom and common sense to act in an appropriate way, no matter what the opposition may do.

All of Jacob's fears proved to be unfounded because God had been at work and had blessed Esau with plenty, so he didn't hold a bitter spirit toward Jacob for what he lost when he sold his birthright. Esau got what he wanted in "the world" of Seir. Jacob got what he had in Padanaram. To a certain extent Jacob gave back what he had taken from Esau, from the bountiful blessings God had given him. Jacob had answers from God to the prayer he had made at Bethel twenty-some years earlier. Then, following in the footsteps of Abraham, he came to Shechem, where he dug a well that the Lord Jesus sat on many generations later and told a thirsty woman of the water of eternal life.

In times of blessing, we may have a tendency to settle down prematurely. To be content in what we have accomplished and not venture farther to where we were in our soul and spirit when God saved us,

may make us comfortable in the wrong place. We may find a place to worship God there, and find a degree of fellowship and spiritual activity there, like “building an altar” and giving it a good name. But there is potential danger in stopping short of where God would have us. There was danger in Shechem. Bethel is the house of God! We can worship God wherever we are, but there are limitations when we do not go all the way to the place of separation to God alone.

### **WHAT HAPPENED TO “ISRAEL?”**

Even though Jacob’s name was changed to Israel and he was to be “no more called Jacob,” the name Jacob is used afterward almost twice as much as the name Israel. In fact, when we speak of the patriarchs, we speak of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not Abraham, Isaac and Israel. When a child of God who has been blessed by God, steps backward from that which took place at the place of spiritual privilege, and allows the old way of life to assert itself, that is a cause for great sadness.

When it is the characteristics of our life before salvation that is most evident in a believer, it is a detriment to the testimony of God, the benefit one could be to others, and to our own spiritual well-being. One can lose the blessing of position because of lack of trust in God. We can lose the peace of God that wants to rule in our heart and we can lose power with God and man. Unfaithfulness in the things of God is a serious backward step.

**The First backward Step,** v.1-11. Even after spending time with God in prayer and being blessed, the obstacles ahead of us in life may not disappear. It is then we are in danger of allowing fear to control our actions rather than faith. When we turn the eyes of our mind toward the difficulties instead of lifting them above the difficulties to God in whom our faith overcomes obstacles, we have taken a step backward. Precautions and groundless fears deprive us of spiritual power and divine fellowship.

**The Second Step Backward,** v.12-17. When we go backward in faithlessness, deception and lack of openness and truth, take us farther back. Our own insight into the sinfulness of the world becomes dim and we start to think that some things may be questionable but not harmful. Things are okay as long as no one is offended. We have to be tolerant and not judgmental of open sin. Then we may go as far as to say one thing may actually mean another. Instead of following Esau to Seir as he implied, Jacob actually intended to go the opposite direction. Outward profession that is not consistent with our conduct, is unfaithfulness in the servants of God.

**The Third Backward Step,** v.17. Like Jacob, when we settle down in a place in the world, it is not sinful in itself, but it indicates a self-centered approach to life that does not take into consideration, God’s will or God’s house. When we become prosperous, we are in danger of forgetting the vows of God that are on us.

**The Fourth Backward Step,** v.18-20. Pilgrim character is easily lost when we content ourselves in a place that is not near to the house of God, nor to the place where God’s people gather to the name of our Lord under His authority. After some time, Jacob moved “in peace” to Shechem which actually belonged to a worldly man of that name. If we “pitch our tent before the city” that is governed by the world system, we have made a statement that we are content there and want to be a part of what goes on there. In such a low spiritual condition of soul, we usually don’t realize the danger of being close to the worldly activities and attitudes around us. It will only be a short time until we really find out how seriously close to trouble we are.

To buy land there to accommodate Jacob's own desire without considering that God had already promised him the land, was an act of doubt that God would keep His word. Those who are in the world and are of the world, do not accept nor understand the reality of faith. To believers, faith is real, but to act on our own and "build an altar" of our own choosing in the place of our own choosing, does not make it right. Even giving it a religious sounding name of our own choosing, does not make it right either. The sin of being "near the city," will bring disaster when we try to blend godliness with worldliness. The world always wins.

Spiritual degeneration leads to spiritual tragedy, even after experiences of conversion and consecration. Neglect of obeying the word of God, leads to the loss of spiritual insight, the use of spiritual gifts and any effective spiritual service.

Spiritual stability comes when we are obedient to the Lord, faithful to Him in life and testimony, and we take for ourselves the blessings of grace and divine power that are available to us. Satisfaction, stability and strength will lead us to bring praise and glory to God, and the blessing of joy to a thankful heart.

## **GENESIS 34**

### **STOPPING SHORT**

The name of God ends chapter thirty-three and begins chapter thirty-five, but is completely absent in chapter thirty-four. This sordid account of lust, greed, anger, compromise, vengeance and murder, demonstrates the consequences that fall on one who is supposed to represent God, being attracted to the world and settling down too close to those who do not know the Lord.

Self-centered, self-seeking impulsive actions, lead to evil and sad results. Even though Dinah's simple walk into the worldly town of Shechem, led to a disastrous family crisis, Jacob did not take the action a father should, nor did he show any leadership in dealing with the whole event. Carelessness in family life can end up with everyone involved paying a high price. Victims like Dinah are soon forgotten or overlooked, but when everyone else forgets, God doesn't. When no one notices the victim being abandoned, God sees them. When other people don't seem to care but just want to get past a sad and evil event and put it out of their minds, God cares and remembers. "Payday comes someday."

We are to separate ourselves from the sinful actions of the world around us and be separated to the Lord. If we do not do what we know God wants, the lack of commitment to the Lord can lead us to awful influences and actions on the part of those who come behind us. Indifference and arrogance lead to deceit, pain and other devastating consequences caused by sin. Sins of omission can soon result in sins of commission.

Sadly, often the characteristic of deceit seen in a father, will be repeated in his children who watch and learn from him. If a father questions everything that doesn't agree with his preconceived notions, his children will likely think this is the way to act and make decisions. Don't trust anyone! Make up your own mind and forget what trusted older people have to say! They still live in the dark ages! If a parent is usually critical and sarcastic, their offspring will often be that way. If faith in God is strong and a person lives by faith and learns from the word of God, it is a reasonable hope to think their children

also will put their faith in Christ and live by faith in “the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

None of us are exempt from the snares and traps laid by our enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil. Even on the high ground of faith, the devil will seek ways to bring down any person who has a testimony of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Jacob yielded to the temptation to stop in Succoth and then Shechem, instead of pressing on to Bethel. After a good outcome with both Laban and Esau, it seemed like he thought “all is well from now on.” He built a house and bought land perhaps thinking the he is now “a prince of God” and was safe from all problems.

If we think we have obtained some objective in the energy of the flesh and are beyond and out of reach of our enemies, we are in grave danger. That danger is not only against us, but more seriously, to those for whom we are responsible both physically and spiritually. To care properly for them, we must remain watchful and alert in the good times, because it is then we are most vulnerable to deception and compromise followed by open attack.

Jacob settled down in the wrong place prematurely and his only daughter paid the high cost. When he did not act appropriately, the cost became higher for everyone who was involved in the tragedy. Being able to rest in what we consider “heavenly places,” does not mean “we have arrived.” The high ground is not a defense from a fall. “Standing on the promises,” does not mean that we will not be harassed and attacked by the powers of darkness.

If an assembly of God’s people ever get to the place where they think they are superior to other assemblies because they are larger in number, richer in wealth and gift, and attractive to the unbelievers around because “they are just like us,” that assembly is in serious danger. Forms, practices and man-made traditions are no safe-guard against internal or external challenges and opposition.

### **THE RESULTS OF FAITHLESSNESS**

Jacob’s stay at Succoth and Shechem seemed to have covered a period of years during which the vow he made at Bethel was either forgotten, ignored, put on a shelf or faded away until he hardly remembered it. Perhaps he considered it to be faced at a more convenient time if the future. He had comfortably settled into an ordinary life just like everyone else in the world where he lived. They didn’t know God and he had met God personally but it is an unfortunate reality that believers can forget the promises of God. Those around him had none of those promises. He had been promised that his seed would inherit the whole land when God gave it to them in His time.

He settled down in his position of comfort as near to the sinful world as he could get without actually being one of them. But not many could tell the difference between him and the idolaters. In fact, the society of sinners, wanted him to be one of them so they could mingle, mix and blend. Then they could get what he had. He even set up his own altar of religious forms to give him a sense of respect and smug complacency with God and men. He was still Jacob the deceiver, not Israel the prince of God.

**The Danger of Faithlessness,** 33:18-20. Christians will often decide where they will live, what they will do for work and where they will retire, based on what pleases us most. We don’t like inconveniences or any responsibilities unless we choose them ourselves. We want opportunities but not obligations. We want an assembly where I can be comfortable but not be counted on too much. I

want to have something to say, but only want to do what I want to do, not what I have been assigned by others.

When making decisions both for ourselves and our family, we need to ask, “What will this do for our spiritual life? Will it challenge us, teach us, help us grow in faith and grace, or will it be merely convenient as we pursue our own ambitions in life?” Learn from Jacob! He chose to live in Shechem with all the risks of being close to the ungodly world. There will be consequences, and likely suffering of one kind or another.

**The Disaster of Faithlessness**, v.1-2. It is natural for teenagers to want to connect with others of their age. To “visit” others and make friends of other young girls was normal, natural and interesting to Dinah. Allowing our young people to mix with others who live a worldly lifestyle, may keep people from saying we are “too strict,” but we must consider what might happen to them. People generally say, “Let them do their own thing. Then they can make up their own minds about what they want to believe or do with their life.” We as parents need to teach them that there is more than this life to live, and more than physical death to die. Most young people today deny the existence of God, or they may say, “If there is a God, what does that have to do with me and what I want out of life?”

The weakness and tolerance of parents regarding sin, moral purity, right and wrong actions, truth, salvation and faith in Christ, are acts of unfaithfulness to God and our children. That leads to disaster from which there is no recovery.

**Faithlessness leads to the Unexpected**, v.3-12. When we hear of terrible news regarding our children, do we keep quiet, or try to act with wisdom and grace, guided by God? Jacob just kept quiet for a while. To do nothing indicates we have a bad conscience and realize our failures are behind the distress of our family. Indecision is not an acceptable answer. An urgent appeal to God is always in order and is always heard. To not do that, and then not act on biblical guidance to deal with the matter, opens the way for those who do not know God, to take matters into their own hands.

The people of the world around us know that in many ways, it is to their advantage to mix with the people of God in business, social life and in some cases, religious life. There are people who “attend church” so they can interface with those who are honest in business and have moral standards by which they live.

**Faithlessness leads to Unworthy Pretexts**, v.13-17. People who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as their own Savior, often cannot understand the motive and reason behind our separation as believers from the world. They want to unite in any way they can for the “advantage of everyone involved.” Covenants with God, and covenants with a spiritual and biblical purpose, do not make sense to them and they “could care less!”

Then there was the “religious pretext” of Dinah’s brothers that was a faithless pretext so that the two men, and perhaps their retainers, could wreak vengeance on those who defiled their sister. In all of this, Jacob remained silent, weak and unfaithful.

**Faithlessness leads to False Trust**, v.18-24. Those who do not know God, only live for the moment and for their own objectives. Proposals between believers and unbelievers for their mutual advantages

materially, are fraught with danger. A believer can lose their reputation in a moment and never be considered trustworthy. Those who look on are inclined to say, “That’s Christians for you! I want nothing to do with the likes of those people!”

**Faithlessness leads to Treachery**, v.25-29. There are people who look at Christians as “religious fanatics” who are intolerant, bigoted people who create problems for everyone and will not conform to the world the way everyone else does. To take matters into our own hands can create problems for a lot of people. There are ways to settle serious matters when we deal with them openly, biblically and honestly with care and caution.

When we don’t do things right, the effects are on the innocent ones who fell into a trap, the guilty ones involved who are willing to make things right, and all those who are around them. The vengeful ones will live the rest of their lives under a cloud of distrust and guilt. These terrible incidents are included in the scriptures because the Holy Spirit knows we can learn from the failures of others.

**Faithlessness leads to False Peace**, v.30. When Jacob finally spoke after the actions and murders were taken by his vengeful sons, his weakness was exposed for what it really was. As far as he was concerned, he was the one who was wronged: not Dinah, not the dead men of Shechem and the captive people of Shechem – just Jacob. Faithlessness brings trouble and blames circumstances and others for our own failures and sin. Right to the end of his life, Jacob never forgot the character of Simeon and Levi and what they had done.

Worldliness is spiritual peril. People of the world system consider those who do not accept what unbelievers take for granted, as judgmental, intolerant and bigoted. The mixing up of believers with unbelievers, has been a tactic of the enemies of God’s children all down through the church age. Worldliness is one way pressure is put on Christians to make them yield to the majority of world opinion. It may be hard to detect, define or describe, but its effects are disastrous. Worldliness prevents spiritual growth because it hinders the impact of our testimony and reduces our testimony to mere words. An altar without true worship has no value. A life with no difference from everyone else has no significance to believers or unbelievers. Worldliness can be prevented by separation from all that is not of God. The dangers of the ungodly world remain, the enemy is the same and the outcome of yielding to worldliness is easily predicted. When we “come out from among them and be ye separate, says the Lord,” then God can be a Father to us, and will defend, protect and safeguard His own family.

## **GENESIS 35**

### **RETURN TO BETHEL**

After a long time, and a family crisis leading to a terrible disaster, Jacob was in a condition of soul in which he would listen to God, rather than go his own way. God knew he was now ready to listen again and He took Jacob in his mind, back to when he first met God at Bethel thirty years before when he was fleeing from Esau. There are times in the lives of God’s people when we must go back to our beginning with God and consider what went wrong with us. When we remember and review what was important then, we are moved to confess and forsake what has happened to keep us away from the Lord. Then we can act on what we know is really important now.

A lot of baggage can accumulate in our homes and lives that should never have been allowed in. We may not realize the negative impact some trinket, tool, device, picture, or even garments of clothes have had on our spiritual life. An altar without personal purification is of no more value than any pile of stones. Anything that diverts our spiritual focus on the Lord, can become an idol that ruins our faith. To wash and change clothes was an outward action that symbolized an inward change in Jacob and his household. Even the earrings were a kind of symbol as to who they were actually listening to each day. We are easily influenced by what we allow ourselves to listen to.

After Jacob had “returned from Padanaram” God had appeared to him, but for some reason he got seriously sidetracked into spending ten years in Succoth and Shechem where the family disaster may have been what woke him up to his departure from God. There are lasting consequences that we can’t avoid when we make decisions without seeking God’s guidance. Our comfortable situation may be stirred up so much that we are ready to listen and pay attention to God. When we do respond to Him, we don’t have to be afraid of what others around will think or do. God can easily take care of any potential opposition or attacks against our person and character even when we have failed grievously in some way.

At the right place and for the right purpose, an altar for worship and fellowship is much more than a pile of stones. It is a meeting place where those who have a covenant with God can come in communion and experience the benefits and joy of true worship in spirit and in truth in the spirit of holiness. When we get away from God and then finally return in obedience and contrition, God can again reaffirm to our thirsty soul, the promises and blessings that we have and can enjoy again. We don’t have to wait for some perfect time in the future to experience the blessings of eternal life, divine truth, the fullness of God and His grace and love. Those things can be ours now and everyday when we are in fellowship with Him.

Tragedies and abnormal events have a way of disturbing our peace and making us wonder what we should do. Jacob surely knew he had to do something, and God knew he was ready to pay attention to what He said, and he would obey divine direction. Like Jacob finally getting up and moving, we will see the scope of what God has promised when we move ahead in our Christian life, with faith and confidence in God. We fail and sometimes allow ourselves to be defiled by the world around us. But when we lift up our eyes to the promises of God and get to Bethel, then the house of God is a wonderful place to be; but more than that, we get back to the God of the house of God.

It is then we are ready to receive fresh revelations from God that open our understanding to greater appreciation of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. God speaks to us then in personal ways through His word and He ministers grace to our souls. Grace, mercy and peace are multiplied through the knowledge of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though there are the losses and griefs common to human life on earth, there are the blessings of divine life that make us more sensitive to God’s will and gives us special hopes for the future of our sojourn here in the world. Benjamin was born amidst grief, reminding us that God is near and speaks peace to our soul at such times. We are able to truly worship the Lord again and are willing to give Him the best a humbled and contrite spirit can give. We see foretastes of glory and the distractions of living in an ungodly world, give way to spiritual insight into why we are here and what God wants us to do in service for Him. His intention is for us to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. He enables us to do for Him that which brings Him joy and satisfaction.

### **Learning from Mistakes**

At Bethel, God again affirmed Jacob's name change as he consecrated himself and his family publicly to God. One of the meanings of the name, "Israel," is "he struggles with God." That indicated a desire to be close to God in spite of all the difficulties and disappointments life brings. Jacob had learned his own weakness and inability to even guide and guard his own home. It seems like his struggles to be with God and yet do his own will, had finally reached the place of surrender.

The Christian-life is not a problem-free life. It is inevitable that difficulties, disappointments, problems and failures will come. We are pilgrims moving through a foreign land, so we will be misunderstood by those are "of the world" and resent us not "being like everyone else or doing the things that everybody does." This is one of the reasons those who "live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." The way we look at events and adverse circumstances, depends on our own choices. If we see them as opportunities for growth in the Lord and service for Him, we will go forward and prevail. If our mind is set to seek to avoid the discomfort that problems bring, we will be unhappy and unfruitful.

Religious forms, like the altar Jacob built in Shechem, are only just that – forms. The altar he built at Bethel and the stone pillar, were not mere forms. They were reminders of who God is and of our way of access to Him by faith. Contact and communion with God is a privilege so great, that respect, reverence, honor and holiness characterize all that happens at such an altar in our lives. The expensive olive oil that was poured out on the pillar, demonstrates the value Israel placed on his renewed fellowship with God. The character of our worship and the attitude we have toward the gathering center, our Lord Jesus Christ, demonstrates the value we place on Him and the place of His name. It also testifies to the value we place on being accepted by God. The Holy Spirit sets the way of communion above anything that is ordinary. When we leave that place, nothing is the same as when we came.

The rest of chapter thirty-five is the conclusion to the main story of Jacob's life. There were the losses of Rachel and Isaac. There were the blessings of a son of his old age and the comfort he got from that. There was the grief of loss of loved ones and the grief caused by the sin of Reuben. There was the reunion and restoration to Isaac, his aged father, near to whom he stayed until Isaac died. Even Esau and Jacob could both join in showing their respect to Isaac at his death and could share their sorrow.

Much of our lives are lived in ordinary ways, in ordinary events of living. It is in those common things of life that our faith is established as an on-going testimony to unbelievers. In the dramatic events, faith may be openly admired, but in the ordinary day-to-day walk of life, our consistency, reputation, and testimony to our personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is observed as the way life is to be lived.

The spiritual unfaithfulness and unfitness of chapter thirty-four where there is no mention of God, is contrasted in chapter thirty-five where the main subject is God. Life without God is a failure. For Christians to try to live without people knowing that we have a living vital faith in Christ, will leave us unfulfilled and unhappy, as well as unfruitful. When we live our life under the sweet influences of Bethel, for God and with God; that is what is life "more abundantly." The difference between being half-hearted or whole-hearted for God is very obvious. Being out of touch with God, doesn't mean He intends to leave us alone.



## **FINALLY, BACK WHERE I BELONG**

**The Call from God**, v.1. Bethel wasn't that far away from Shechem. But thirty miles to meet God at His house, when a person has taken their ease in the world, is more than we want to go when we are comfortable. Finally, Jacob was forced to move and he went to Bethel but was at least ten years late in getting there. It had been thirty years earlier when he first met the Lord there. He had vowed to return there if he came back in peace. God had blessed him and the conditions were met, but the vow was not yet paid. Repentance and faith are necessary when a child of God is out of touch with Him.

We can get used to the world and not even discern the true condition of life around us as well as in our own life, if we allow ourselves to remain in a sinful, unspiritual condition of soul. We may be afraid of what might happen to us by those around us if we do not cooperate and conform to the life the world insists on. When our spiritual condition, the pressures of society around, and God Himself combine to lead us out of a place in which we have been comfortable in body, and we are being conformed to the world, it will be costly and hard. Thankfully, the Lord will preserve us and guide us to the place He wants us to be when we yield to His will.

**The Special Preparation of Jacob**, v.2-4. The earnest and real change in Jacob produced a whole-hearted response in his household. The little gods and religious trinkets that had come in, were taken out and buried. All of the things that hindered the presence of God being felt in their midst, were all buried and left behind permanently. The surrender to God of our mind, our heart, our will and our whole being, will include the moral reservations and personal opinions that we may have kept secret. They all have to go before spiritual blessings will come. We cannot sanctify or consecrate worldly things to God. Anything that is of the world, must be buried and totally forsaken.

Satisfaction in our soul, strength in our character and effectiveness in our service comes after the evil habits and practice have been broken, confessed and forsaken. The "books have to be burned" that keep us from obedience to God. Jacob's family must have been impressed with the change in him, now that he was willing to be obedient to God and wanted to be back in fellowship with Him.

**The Impressive Journey**, v.5. The journey wasn't far from Shechem to Bethel (Luz), but as Jacob and his family and all that he had, moved out from the idol-worshipping Canaanites, no one tried to stop them or even question or hinder them. All the people around were terrified of them as the fear of the Lord was experienced by all. As that large company of people, material things, herds, flocks and herdsmen moved down the road of God's leading, there would have been an awareness that something important was happening.

A lesson for us is that when we know God is leading us to make a change, then we must act on divine guidance. Self-will and self-centered opinions do not provide spiritual guidance. When God is for us and with us in any change we make in life, we are on safe ground all the way. "If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."

**The Wonderful Arrival**, v.6. There was no lagging behind, no hesitation, as Jacob and all the people with him arrived at Bethel (Luz). It was thirty years before and he had been alone when he was last there. Now, "he and all the people" came to the place of God's choosing. How thankful we can be when our hearts burn with gratitude to God and joy in our soul as we find that we are in the path of

God's leading. Peace, rest and assurance settle upon us as we draw near to God and find that He draws near to us when we meet Him where He intends us to be. Even more so, when we realize there are a lot more people at the place of blessing because we came there and they came with us! Our influence and testimony do have an impact on others.

**The Act of Obedience**, v.7-8. When "the vows of God are on us" and we are able to fulfill them in the right place, in the right way, in the presence of God and before those who have been influenced by us, it is a time of humility, worship and joy. God becomes the Object of our thoughts, the expressions of our heart. What pleases God is what is important to us. Our concept of God reaches higher than ever before as He is revealed to us more in His Personhood and in a more profound way than ever before. Now, we are not only at "the house of God," which attracts us to that place, but "The God of the house of God" fills our hearts and minds.

Consequently, we are changed in our life and testimony to finally become "Israel" in our own right because of God's grace to us. We will remember the past with all its difficulties, but are now renewed in our confidence in God who never changes. The difference is that He can now bring us forward in faith even further as our experiences and memories remind us of God's faithfulness to us when we failed Him.

**The New Understanding**, v.9-13. God revealed Himself to Jacob again and blessed him. Reconciliation had taken place and the cloud which had been a barrier between them, was no longer there. It must have been like sunshine after rain. The times of refreshment had come! Jacob had heard God's voice, experienced God's presence and in a fresh revelation of who God is and who he was, brought the full assurance of faith.

Fruitfulness and spiritual increase come when communion and fellowship with God is renewed and real. Only God knows the full extent of blessing that can come to many when we are brought back to where we belong, doing what we should do and rejoicing in our God. Such times encourage us and gives us power with God and others. We are able to be strengthened in our Christian heritage and the promises associated with doing the will of God from the heart.

**The Memorial of Gratitude**, v.14-15. The pillar of stones and the best oil poured out as the first drink-offering we read of in the scriptures, testified to how much this meant to Jacob. We will remember those times in our lives in which our gratitude and thankfulness was such that we could find no words to express the fullness of our joy. How great and marvelous are the mercies and grace of God!

God's love is beyond our ability to describe. God does not forsake us, but when we sin and wander away from Him, He waits, watches and uses various means to draw us back to Himself. His love will not allow us real rest until we find our rest in Him. He is long-suffering toward us because He knows what is right for us, and yet because of the principle of free-will, knows there are lessons we must learn. God's justice is absolute. Sin has no place in the life of a believer and God has to deal in strict justice with every sin before we can be restored to Him in fellowship and peace. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Wrongs must be made right. Truth must be maintained. Justice has to be served. Holiness must never be compromised. Rest of soul and spiritual satisfaction can come when God is satisfied. God's grace can

be restored when repentance is real and sin has been confessed and forsaken. Then we return in faith, humbled and grateful to know that the barrier has been removed. It is then we will yield ourselves to the Lord and rely on His mercy to restore to us the joy of our salvation and the experience of the marvels of God's grace to us.

## **GENESIS 36**

### **SUMMARY OF A GENERATION**

The last verses of chapter thirty-five and chapter thirty-six, list the descendants of Jacob and Esau. Truly, the promise to Abraham that he would be “the father of many nations,” is a fact. Not only Israelis, but many of the Middle East tribal groups are descendants of Esau as the Jews are from Jacob.

Reading through the lists of names of Esau's family like Edomites, we find Teman. Eliphaz the Temanite was one of Job's friends. Job was from Uz, so he probably lived somewhere in Edom. Amalek, the enemy of the children of Israel, was one of the chiefs of Edom. His tribe was the first to come against the children of Israel when they left Egypt. Before Israel had a king, there was a monarchy in Edom.

There was a separation between Esau and Jacob when they were both in the land of Canaan because of the need of pasture land to support the livestock each had. When Esau moved to Mount Seir, he also took more wives and had children by them as well as by the Canaanite wives he had earlier.

In spite of many errors and failures, the children of Israel were of the spiritual line which can bring the fruits of truth being transmitted through that nation to other nations. The principles of life being lived as God intends were clearly taught and written down by Moses for our instruction as well as that of the Jews. In Esau's descendants the fruit of the flesh is exposed. Some was of good quality and some was bad, but they were all of the flesh. Fleshly things may seem like good fruit, but the true nature of the flesh will always be fleshly.

Ultimately, there will be war between that which is of the flesh and that which is of the Spirit of God. The Edomites would not allow the children of Israel to cross their land on the way to the promised land four hundred years later. Under the rule of David as king of Israel, Edom was subject to Israel. Then when Israel failed as a nation, Edom rebelled and rejoiced at the fall of Israel. The bitterness remained after generations had passed, because there is no way that which is of the flesh, can co-exist with that which is spiritual. The conflict between the flesh and the Spirit can be experienced in the personal life of a believer, and it leaves them unhappy, conflicted and dysfunctional as a Christian.

Thankfully, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

### **ESAU, A PROFANE PERSON**

The twin sons of Isaac are a study in contrasts. Outwardly, Esau must have been attractive and his life was interesting. Jacob seemed to be unattractive in personality because of his sly ways and unappealing house-bound interests. We have to learn as we live and deal with people, to take them as

they are. People change as years pass and to pass judgment on them by what they once were or how they fit our criteria as to what is attractive, can be very wrong.

“Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.” The right principles of living, and the practice and conduct of a person life can change when a person comes to Christ for salvation and are changed by the new birth and new nature given to a believer. It is up to us to determine what is important and apply it ourselves to things that are eternal rather than things that are temporal. Appropriate practice and conduct are not automatically learned. We choose who we will serve and how we will live.

Esau's history gives us insight into one born into privilege, who thinks they are entitled to have given to them whatever they want. He was favored by his father, but even so, “despised his birthright.” His true character was revealed in that, even before Jacob offered the food Esau wanted in exchange for his birthright, he had considered his birthright of no real value to him. Each of us need to take the time to consider what is of real importance in our life. The accumulation of money, goods and property are things that most people place a high value on. We need to realize as the children of God, that we have this opportunity while living here on earth, to lay up treasure in heaven.

Esau's marriage to two Canaanite women, was a deliberate act on his part to be connected with the world system around him, rather than to be known as the heir of Abraham and Isaac. The principles of faith and living by faith were far from his area of interest. He lived for the moment as do many people today who think “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die,” is what life is all about.

Esau again took matters into his own hands when he realized what he had done, and Jacob had left for Haran with his father's blessing. Perhaps he thought by taking a wife from Ishmael's family, he could retrieve his position at least in the eyes of Isaac and Rebekah. For all of his hot-headed ways, he seemed to have a warm-heartedness about him that Jacob didn't have. But none of the charm and nice characteristics of the man outwardly, reached to his soul. He, and those after him of his tribe, continued to demonstrate hostility toward Jacob and the children of Israel.

Esau's character traits seemed to be that of a person with a bright outward disposition who wasn't easily troubled by what went on around him as long as he could do what he wanted. However, under the bright exterior was a man of an impulsive nature who could bear a grudge and a bitter spirit. He was a “profane” (sensual) man who lived to satisfy himself, his physical desires and would sacrifice whatever was necessary to get what he wanted. As far as he was concerned, he didn't seem to want anything to do with God.

This characteristic is true of those who live for themselves and what they can get. Some people avoid any teaching about God and determine to put God out of all their thoughts, lest they become troubled by a guilty conscience. The root problem in the life of any person who lives a purely secular life, is that they are like the person who said, “No God for me!”

Superficial attractiveness is not enough to give meaning to life. Advantages such as personal attractiveness, financial success, opportunities to advance in the eyes of the people and even a certain moral integrity, are not enough to form a spiritual relationship with God that will last forever. People

may surround you when you please them, but superficial things do not last very long, and then their deceptiveness is exposed and the person is forgotten.

Divine grace is essential for salvation from sin and it is also essential for the development of Christian character. A new nature bestowed by God's grace, opens the door to a whole new life that rises way above anything education, circumstances and opportunities may give a person. Faith in Christ gives us a life that is abundant and coordinates our life with the life of our Lord. It is then "Christ is our life."

We all have opportunities to be what God intends, but what we do with those opportunities depends on us. A person can grow up in a godly home with loving Christian parents, and yet reject all that was taught and their spiritual influence. To deliberately set aside what we have been taught may be the greatest lost opportunity a person will ever have.

Esau finally realized the importance of what he had discounted as of little value and had despised. But he could never get it back even though he wept bitter tears. Tears of regret are not repentance toward God. An awakened conscience and unfulfilled hopes do not mean that self-will gives way to faith in God. God is righteous and He gives opportunities to all men everywhere to repent and come in faith to Him and be saved. But a person does "reap what they sow." "He that being often reprov'd and hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Divine grace demonstrated by the wonder of God's mercy should never be taken lightly. Our responsibilities in life may sometimes make us stop and take account of what we have done and compare that with what we should have done. We can't undo what has been done that is wrong, but thankfully, "God is long-suffering, and is not willing that any should perish," and He wants all to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth. Esau's tears of regret and remorse did not bring him to the place of repentance. He wanted things on his own terms and walked away rejecting revealed light. His seed became a nation because of the promise of God to Abraham and Isaac, not because he deserved it or earned it.

Thankfully, there are those from the heritage of Esau who have been saved and will be saved even though he was lost. "Out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation," there are those whom have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and who will enjoy the eternal blessings of God that are promised to any person who will come in personal faith to the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **GENESIS 37**

### **SUFFERING LEADS TO GLORY**

There is more told about Joseph than any of the patriarchs before him. His story explains the development of the nation of Israel and reveals the sovereign operation of God in overruling evil and leading ultimately to victory. Truth and righteousness will prevail in spite of all the evil and wrong that happens. Personal character will be tested in many ways and suffering will have to be endured when a person is committed to God in their personal life and to righteousness socially. The life of a suffering saint like Joseph illustrates the Person of Christ when He was here found in fashion as a man. Each of the people of faith in the Genesis account, illustrates faith in a special way. Joseph's faith is an example of the testing and results of faith. Faith triumphs over all opposition that comes against it.

Joseph stood in Egypt, where Abraham fell. Suffering conquers that which test faith. Suffering comes when an honest report of evil is given as in the case where Joseph reported the evil in which his brothers were engaged. One is judged for seeing the evil, and hated for reporting it. There is a price to pay for walking in the light. Walking in truth means one turns from evil and rebukes it. Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and was hated without a cause. He testified to the evil works of men of whatever nature it was. He came to His own, and was rejected by them. As He suffered, so will those who belong to Him and live godly lives in Christ Jesus.

### **JOSEPH IS A REPRESENTATIVE OF ISRAEL**

All down through the generations of the history of the Hebrew nation, there has been times of glory and times of suffering. As a people, the Jews have struggled with God and with man. Nations and individuals oppose Israel, and yet, they still stubbornly resist their true Messiah. The day will come when in humiliation and true repentance the nation will submit to the universal authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, and they will look on Him whom they pierced. The account of Joseph and his family is a historical account of what happened to them and is like a prophetic account of what has happened, is happening and will happen to Israel as a nation.

All the nations of the world will have been blessed because our Lord Jesus Christ “came unto His own and His own received Him not.” From His wonderful story of grace to the Jews, there has come the blessing of the Gentiles also being accepted into the family of God when they put their personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer. Out of His willingness to save us, and because of His love toward us, He demonstrated His love by dying in our place upon the cross so that He could justly “bring us to God.”

**Joseph’s Home Life**, v. 1-4. Joseph would have been a small boy of four or five years of age when Jacob left Haran for Canaan. The tensions between Laban and his sons and Jacob would hardly have been known by him. His older half-brothers would have been exposed to the jealousy, scheming and deception of both Laban and Jacob. The evil influence of people and places does have an effect on those who have been brought up in those circumstances. It is not uncommon for those who are exposed to evil practices when they are young, to think that is normal, and to do the same things themselves. How important it is for parents to protect their children from those things that defile their minds and pollute their character. We need to avoid any persons or things, whether they are relatives or not, who would wrongly influence our children. The differences between the young Joseph and his older siblings were obvious to Jacob who had a special love for Joseph. The garment he made for Joseph was an obvious statement, not only of personal preference, but of his position in the family. All of those who were older including Reuben the first-born, were passed by and Joseph was identified as the one who would take leadership in the tribe of Israel during his generation.

The hatred of Joseph’s brothers, caused by jealousy and bitterness of being perceived to be subservient to Joseph and “put down,” was directed toward the young teenager, not Jacob the patriarch, as this final drama of the narrative of Genesis begins at chapter thirty-seven. Joseph didn’t seem to be spying on his brothers who were well-known for the evil in which they had been associated in Canaan. The sons of Jacob already had a reputation for mayhem, murder, dishonesty and evil in the places where they lived. Apparently, they continued in their evil ways so that Joseph was simply stating to Jacob what was going on around him. Jacob was likely more isolated as an old man and just lived from day to day without a lot of awareness of life in the world around him.

In our lives there are times to be silent and times when we must speak out. When criminal activity takes place, we are obligated to report it to those in authority. Tale-bearing and gossip are always wrong, but when there is an honest report of facts that are given without malice, guile or exaggeration, that is right. A young boy making a report that was true against older grown men, and that report would reflect on the reputation of the whole tribe, would certainly made him the object of their hatred. It would have especially irritated them because he was pure in life and moral in the way he conducted himself in every situation. He was practicing in his young life what he had been taught and what the others sons had rejected in their lives.

**Joseph's Dreams**, v.5-11. On top of all the hatred those men had for Joseph, was the dreams he told them that had a meaning they could not miss. Perhaps he was naïve or maybe he was just being honest, but the implication of the dreams that both they and their father and mother would bow to Joseph whose own mother had died, infuriated them. Their animosity at what they considered his pride and haughty way, increased. The spiritual ideals by which Joseph lived as an older child, and the spiritual intuition that God gave him, held the promise of an honorable and influential life that was very different from the rest of the family of Jacob.

**Joseph's Responsibility**, v.12-17. The herds and flocks of Jacob's tribe made it necessary that they move across the miles of Canaan to find feed for the animals. When they had gone all the way from Hebron to Shechem, about sixty miles, Jacob had every right to be concerned. It was at Shechem two of his sons had killed every man and taken captive the women and children and all their possessions. No wonder he sent Joseph who he could trust to tell the truth, to see how things were going.

To be trusted by others with anything, calls for a commitment to the truth and for personal integrity on one's own part. Obedience and a willingness to respond to directions given by those in authority is expected of any child of God. It may be inconvenient to us to drop what we are doing, to do what others who have authority over us ask, but it is right to act with promptness and without complaint.

**Joseph's Brothers**, v.18-28. When our Lord Jesus was here, He said that believers in Him should not marvel because worldly people hate them. "They hated Me before they hated you." The godly are characterized by love for others and for God. The ungodly want what they want, even if it means to put down or get rid of people who get in their way.

That was the way it was with Joseph's brothers. Just to see Joseph coming their way, stirred up their anger to the extent they made plans to kill him. Some of them had killed before and they were prepared to kill again – even their half-brother, because of their deep-seated jealousy against him. Before Joseph even got to them, they had a simple plan to kill him and cover up their evil deed with a logical explanation. The heart of man is only evil continually.

Reuben as the first-born felt some responsibility toward Joseph. He may have had children of his own around Joseph's age. So, he stood up against the others and had Joseph put in a dry pit intending to take him back to his father. While the brothers sat and ate, Joseph pled with them to let him out. Those same brothers years later, spoke about that time when he wanted them to spare his life but they had paid no attention to him. Reuben's intention was to get him home against but there was a moral weakness in the older brother.

Judah seemed to have some leadership qualities and could see a profitable alternative that would satisfy the blood-thirsty among them, and the more civilized brothers. Sometimes the circumstances of life seem so bad that it is hard to determine if there is any solution at all to the problems we face. It is not possible for us to determine what is right depending only on circumstances. They can be a danger as well as an opportunity. We have to make our decisions in life from a higher source of authority even though we can take into account some of the events that happen to us. Our will should always be obedient to the will of God, even though we don't know what is ahead of us.

**The Result of the Actions**, v.29-36. Reuben must have been away when Judah made the proposal to sell Joseph into slavery. The deception was carried out when the blood of a goat was used to cover the action taken, just like Jacob had done years before. Jacob believed what he was told when he saw blood on the special garment he had made for Joseph. The shock of bereavement and sudden death can lead a person to where they are beyond consolation.

Joseph's brothers got what they wanted. The Midianites got what they wanted, and Potiphar, an official of the government of Egypt got what he wanted – all at the expense of an innocent young man of seventeen years of age. There sometimes is a high cost to righteousness that we must pay. When that happens, look up and beyond the question of, "Why did this happen to me?" to a far more important question, "What do I do now?"

**The sin of man** is the root of all the evil and trouble in this chapter. Temptation will confront every believer in one way or another. Envy is sin against people or a person. Covetousness is sin that makes us want things. When a person is dissatisfied with the way things are with us, we are in danger of both envy and covetousness. Envy leads to "every evil work" and is like "rottenness in our bones."

**The grace of God** is in contrast to the sin of man. God was not first in the lives of Joseph's brothers, but He was in the life of Joseph. Love and grace come from God to those who know Him, trust in Him, delight in Him and find it a great joy to serve Him. When these are active in our lives, we are protected from envy and covetousness.

God's grace, also is greater than sin and overcomes it. When sin is defeated in an individual, God's plans for us can be accomplished even though we may not even know what is happening and why. Sin can hinder the goal being reached right away, but God's grace and purposes will ultimately defeat sin. Good really does not come out of evil, but good can come in spite of evil. Joseph's brothers, with all their evil schemes and actions, could not defeat the objective God has in all those events that took place in this final part of the story of this family. Jacob's seed had been chosen by God to bring blessing to the world through our Lord Jesus Christ, and it was going to happen in spite of the sinful evil practices of Joseph's brothers.

## **GENESIS 38**

### **THE SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS**

Jacob had met God at Luz and was given a new nature, so that his experience at Bethel was real and good. However, he had not changed all that much in his outward conduct and practices. Righteousness



and separation from the world of idolatry and its open sin is a fundamental requirement of a child of God who intends to live for God. Sadly, most of Jacob's sons went farther into sin than he had gone. Simeon and Levi had gone so far as to murder a whole community of helpless men in their quest for vengeance. Reuben had defiled himself and his father's wife by his immorality.

Then there came the bright spot in the family dynamics as Joseph grew toward maturity with a consciousness of God giving him the power to live above the darkness of his brothers, the complacency of his father and the dysfunction of the family. But even then, the worldliness, the moral and spiritual darkness that permeated that family, made Joseph an object of their hatred. His purity of spirit and life, his dignity and frank honesty, exposed the deceit, hostility and jealousy of his siblings.

When God steps into the scene of a family, an assembly or a nation, we may not understand at first why He allows things to go so far astray and become so evil. Joseph was sent by God into Egypt to prepare for their survival and preservation as a chosen people. He said himself he was to go ahead of his family, "to preserve a posterity for [them] in the earth and to save their lives by a great deliverance. So, it was not [them] who sent [Joseph] to Egypt, but God." People have choices to make and consequences to accept because they make those choices. The sons of Jacob were not fit to be a blessing to "all the nations of the world" as they were, because they became more wicked as the years passed.

It was in God's sovereign plan to bring upon His chosen people whatever was necessary to bring His promises to fulfillment. He was willing to take all the time necessary to change them from selfish, evil people, to people who lived by His standards, no matter how long it took. It took four hundred years before God could even get them ready to obey Him, even though they had become idol-worshippers in Egypt. Free-will led Jacob's sons to go farther and farther into the evil lifestyle of the Canaanites. They were being influenced to be like them, and then they adapted to the idolatrous practices.

God commands His people to "come out from among them, and be ye separate says the Lord." Unfortunately, people today, even believers in our Lord Jesus, don't take God seriously in this regard. They think they have a unique situation that makes mixing light with darkness, okay in their own personal case. The end result may not be seen right away, but evil dominates when what God commands and what is right, is compromised.

The story of Judah and Tamar seems like an intrusion in the story of Joseph, until we see that God intends us to see the contrast between the morals of Joseph and Judah. Joseph was sold by his brothers, but his slavery in Egypt was by divine design and God was with him and strengthened him in times of temptation. Through Joseph, God's plan was to ultimately bless His chosen people. Judah deliberately left his family, the family of promise, to be with and like the Canaanite idolaters. The disintegration of Jacob's family, if allowed to continue as Judah chose to go, would have made them lose their identity and be just another ungodly family in Canaan.

Sexual union is not intended to be merely the union of bodies, but of the whole person – body, soul and spirit of a man and woman for life. All physical unions outside of a monogamous relationship are sinful. Unsolvable complications in life follow a willing rejection of divine order and the commands of the word of God.

This sordid chapter that exposes the sinfulness that even privileged people allow in their lives, serves to give us both warnings and instructions. God knew what was happening to Jacob's family and that it would continue to get worse if allowed to continue in the children of Israel. Israel as a people were in God's plan for blessings in the ages ahead, but they were off to a very bad start.

In a sovereign act of divine purpose, God chose Joseph as the instrument to further His plans. The famine He allowed to happen was in the will of God. The state of Judah's moral condition certainly shows how great the need of Jacob's family was as long as they remained in Canaan and under the influence of the people of the world around them.

Moral dangers are all around God's people today. The world, the flesh and the devil are all conspiring against those who live a righteous, godly and holy life. If a person goes out of their way to associate with and then join in with the ways of the ungodly, that person is in great danger of losing their soul if they are not saved. If a believer is inclined to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of the scornful – that person will not only go astray themselves, but like Judah, those coming after them will go farther, and be seriously and adversely affected.

### **THE SHAME OF IMMORALITY**

Judah's first two sons died in their sins and wickedness and Judah lost all semblance of being in the line of the promises of God. What horror came on him as he finally realized how far into sin he had gone. Whether he really repented or not of what he had done is not clear. Yet, in the plans of God, grace was such that through Judah and Tamar, came the promised seed. Perez, may have suffered because of the sins of his parents, but God did not hold him responsible for their sin. God's grace toward us can lift us above and beyond the darkness of an ungodly home, or a sinful past, to where God can again be a "father" to us and we can live in happy fellowship with Him as His "sons and daughters."

The possibilities of human sin can lead a privileged person who has been surrounded by that which is good, to being brought down by temptation. Not only can the sinning person be shamed and brought down in the darkness of evil, but they can be the cause of others sinning. Sin can lead even those of our own family to go farther away from God when they excuse their evil conduct because of ours. Sin can take a person so far into the paths of wickedness, that it is extremely hard to turn around, let alone get back to the place of recovery. But for God's grace, those who choose to do what they know is wrong, would never get back to where they find the joy of the Lord in their soul.

The authority of God's providence makes it right to do whatever is necessary to turn wayward people around. The sale of Joseph as a slave seems to have no moral meaning in the narrative, and seems to be without a purpose behind it, until we realize God uses what may seem evil at first, to bring about lasting good. Israel had to be made to "come out from among them [Canaanites] and be separate," and that command needs to be brought before us today. Separation from sin is still essential for Christian testimony.

The "rightness" of God's punishment for sin is based on the justice of God. His standards of holiness are written on the tables of human hearts. What people do with that law, is up to them. They have the ability to do what God wants and to make right moral choices. God does not favor one person over another nor does He pit one against another. The fact is, that sin is sin in any person and willful sin has

consequences that follow. God deals with the sins of His children as well as those of lost souls. For believers, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” “Whoso confesses and forsakes [sin] will find mercy.”

The marvelous grace of God can deal with the sins of the repentant sinner, and transform a person’s character so that they are changed within and without. It is a wonder that from the depths of the sins of Judah and Tamar, “our Lord sprang out of Judah.” Humans would have never done this because of our sense of propriety and righteousness, but God’s grace rises far above human opinions. Grace forgives, changes, uplifts and is willing to use forgiven sinners for God’s glory.

Of course, it is wrong to choose sin so that grace can be made evident, but grace doesn’t leave a sinning child of God who repents and forsakes sin, in the mire of defeat and despair. We can’t undo what has been done, but what is broken can be healed, and grace can give new power over sin in the life of one who was broken. Redemption power and life has pardon, peace and purity in it to the extent that the broken-hearted, the captives and all other people with problems can be transformed by the power of God, rather than being molded into the world’s form.

A warning to us lest we think ourselves impervious to the sins of Judah, is that none of us can boast of sinless perfection. “Let him that thinks he can stand, take heed lest he falls.” It is only by God’s grace that we have been preserved from blatant and open sin. That surely is a reason to be thankful to God who causes us to “triumph in Christ.” It is incumbent on us to not be lifted up in our own minds and say to ourselves, “I would never do that!” There are many snares, traps and stumbling blocks in our path that can quickly trip us up and cause us to fall. God requires us to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly before Him.

We will all likely have more than one reason for self-abasement and the need to come to God in contrition and repentance. He will forgive us and deliver us from our own sins, and even from copying the sins of others who have come before us. We can learn lessons and take warnings from our past mistakes and from the mistakes and failures of those who passed this way before us.

## **GENESIS 39**

### **STRENGTH IN ADVERSITY**

The development of character and the ability to deal with temptation and opposition, happens to those who have felt bondage. Then they will know true deliverance. Our minds want to be controlled by pureness and patience, but the power of things around us and challenges that tempt the mind, seek to take control. Thankfully, God delivers, loves waits for, empties and then fills us with divine strength when we seek for His wisdom and power. The sifting of the trials of faith are more valuable than gold that perishes. Character is formed, developed, tested and challenged in various ways during our lifetime. We must be careful that we do not over-emphasize talent and under-emphasize character.

Behind each event in the life and development of a young man into a leader, is the working of the Spirit of God who reveals some distinct trait of character that can change a trial into a blessing. The key to the whole narrative in this chapter is the phrase, “The Lord was with Joseph.” I wonder if this could ever be said of me. And yet, looking back over life’s experiences, there is no other explanation for the blessings I have experienced so many times. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Joseph’s God is our God and He has never changed and never will change. He cares for,

protects, defends and blesses those whose faith is in Him. An active and vital faith, enables us to live a fruitful and fulfilling life when we know the Lord is with us.

Joseph was passive and submissive when wronged, and when he could do nothing about what was happening to him. When the situation changed and he was able to act in the fear of God with honor, integrity and devotion to duty, he did that effectively because he knew the Lord was with him. He never laid accusations on his brothers, Potiphar's wife or other people when he was treated unfairly even when innocent. He didn't make challenges of reproach nor did he make lengthy appeals. In silence, he endured what he later said was, "The anguish of his soul."

Silence in times of false accusations may not answer the subtle suggestions or open challenges we have to face from those who oppose us, or those who may not even know us. There is a quiet strength and inner power from God that enables us to not "revile again" when we are reviled; not threaten when we are threatened; not retaliate when openly accused. People of integrity and faith, know that if God be for us who can be against us?

In spite of all the confusion and conflicts in Joseph's life, he had learned enough about God from Jacob, that he feared God, believed in Him, knew God could be trusted in every situation – and he had learned all this and taken it to heart when he was young. The important moral choices by which we choose to live, are made when we are young and are learning how to live right. We may be a bit tentative when first challenged by those who do not know what a true Christian is like. First victories may seem small to others, but they are big and major events to those who pass through them.

Joseph's first test in Egypt had to do with his employment. Potiphar, though an idolater, could see the Lord, was with Joseph. His attitude, body language, tone of voice, respect and sense of duty and awareness of who he was, made Joseph a unique person in Potiphar's household. A trusted slave was a valuable person to have in the service of a member of the ruling class in Egypt. To have turned over to Joseph all responsibility for running his household and directing his property was a testimony to the high regard Potiphar had for Joseph's character.

A person who can be trusted, is the result of moral strength and character, more than of talent. Both are important, but selfishness, deceit and faithlessness may be in a talented person and have an effect on their work. A person of good character may be hard to discern at first. More than judging a person's talents and qualifications to do a work, is the insight to see what is in a person and the courage to go beyond outward evidence. Outward evidence reveals skill and talent; inward character that is needed for the "long haul," takes awhile to clearly be revealed and then judged.

Joseph's character became obvious to those in Potiphar's house, even to his faithless wife. Her lustful, lascivious appeals were rejected day after day as she tried to tempt him to submit to her and sin against God. Time after time he refused by virtue of strength of character and commitment to God. He rejected her solicitation to sin knowing that it would be an act of treachery against his master, an act of defilement against himself, and more seriously, an act of rebellion against God. Joseph's conscience was bound by the truth of God and his commitment was to God Himself. He was not going to "sin against God." It was more important for him to please God than to please the sinful flesh and defile what God intends to be holy. His reverence and respect for God controlled his life.

The guidelines for living for those who are saved early in life and are brought up in a Christian environment, are made early in life. There may not be a dramatic change in one who comes to know the Lord early in life, but there will be evidence as they mature and grow in the Lord. There will likely be an experience of personal consecration in which the reality and depth of their faith becomes as real as their conversion to God. Those who God saves from a life of open sin, usually demonstrate a great difference in lifestyle and character change. What Joseph learned when he was young in his father's house, he practiced when he came to the place where he was forced into a new kind of life, with responsibility put upon him and he was forced to grow quickly into acting maturely.

We should learn from Joseph who resisted the temptation to sin against God, by being open about our faith in God, our commitment to Him and our commitment to our own personal integrity. Sexual sin is not just between two people, but it is against God who never intended the seed of human beings to be adulterated.

### **IN EGYPT**

From a favored son, to a slave and then being sold for a price to be a household servant, would really test the faith of a grown man, let alone a seventeen-year-old alone in a foreign country. He was placed among people of a different culture, different religion, different language, and yet remarkably, Joseph quickly rose above those things, and overcame those obstacles. He was raised to a high and trusted position in a rich man's household because "The Lord was with Joseph."

**In Prosperity**, v.1-6. Instead of complaining about unfair treatment, it is a good testimony to God's grace and power, to be thankful for every one of His mercies to us. When we do the very best we can in any legitimate situation, using all our abilities, talents and strength to produce the best result, that lets others know the Lord is with us as He was with Joseph. Because the Lord was with him, Joseph was a prosperous man. That is quite a statement to make about one who is a slave.

Real prosperity does not depend on circumstances or how much a person is worth financially. True prosperity is based on character and character on our faithfulness to God. A person whose character is intact, so that it is obvious to those with whom we work, is a person who will be trusted even though our superiors may not have spiritual insight. Our work and conduct, along with a pleasing attitude, enables other people to see the reality of our life of faith. When one honors God, God honors them.

As long as Joseph was in Potiphar's household, the Lord blessed that house for Joseph's sake. God-fearing employees instill confidence in them when they use their capabilities wisely and they can be trusted. When God "prosper" a person, that person lives with a genuine hope based on their faith in God. We don't know the future, but we know who holds the future in His hand.

**In Peril**, v.7-12. For young people particularly, but in a sense, for older people as well, there will come many occasions to be tempted in one way or another. In fact, temptation is one of the greatest tests of character, convictions and conduct that we will face in our lives. An innocent person becomes a person of virtue when tempted. Being tempted is not sin, but yielding to it is sin.

Joseph "refused" to yield to sexual temptation even though it came day after day. He had power because by an act of faith and an attitude of his will, without any hesitation or delay, he made it clear he was not going to do what the woman wanted. He refused! His mind and his conscience were on full

alert. He was trusted and honored by his master, and Potiphar had faith in his trusted servant. He was faithful to both his master and to his God. His integrity remained intact as it should be, no matter what trying circumstances brought. Joseph's first duty was to God who was his Supreme Master and he would not sin against God. To him, God was first!

In spite of all his virtue, sin would not be daunted and the temptation continued until sin's desire could not be contained. There are times when temptation by its very nature, demands that we run away from it as fast as we can. The sin of uncontrolled passion does not take defeat without a fight. To flee some temptations, is the only way we can resist. We must flee as fast as possible from such sins. False love can turn into hate in an instant.

Sin does not have dominion over us. We do not need to surrender to sin. We can remain pure and we can be victorious over sin when we face sin by the power of God, strength of character and the grace that God provides when grace is needed.

**In Prison**, v. 13-23. Slander is hard to deal with when there are no witnesses to a charge that is made. There usually are some people who want to believe the worst. They will say or suggest that there must be some truth to the accusation, or it wouldn't have been made in the first place. The tongue is an unruly evil that cannot be tamed and causes much hurt. Evil can quickly come from an unguarded or lying tongue.

Potiphar must have known what his wife was like or else he would have killed Joseph on the spot. Joseph, on the other hand, remained silent without defense or making an accusation against Potiphar's wife in order to save himself. Perhaps he wanted to spare Potiphar's wife from dishonor, or he knew that Potiphar knew him and his character. For whatever reason, Joseph did not remonstrate but "suffered wrong" because he knew "the Lord was with him."

The value of an unblemished character cannot be overemphasized. The force of character, the dignity of a clear conscience, the silence of innocence all demonstrate what a child of God should be like. It was those same character traits that led the keeper of the prison to commit to Joseph all that was needed to run the affairs of the prison, in the same way he had run the household of Potiphar.

### **Difficulties lead to discipline**

The value of difficulties is not always understood at first. It is good when a yoke is laid on a young man and it results in the development of strength of character. It is not good to have to go through the difficulties, but they prepare us for further and fuller service for the Lord. Yokes strengthen integrity, promote maturity and open doors that had been previously closed. The best things in life are not easy. The costs are high but for us, it is good when we know like Joseph, "The Lord was with Joseph."

The duty in difficulties is that we maintain our composure, our integrity and our commitments to God and other people when passing through the hard times. Such times, lived with grace instead of complaints, a cheerful spirit instead of disheartening grumbling and being thankful for small mercies instead of dissatisfaction with circumstances, can be a powerful testimony to our faith in God.

Assurance in difficulties can be maintained when we are conscious of the presence of God with us. There may be times when we may wonder for a short time, if God has forgotten or forsaken us. And

then, in some way, He speaks peace to our soul and the light of life shines again in us as we wait for Him to do what He wants for His own purposes. Disappointments sometimes are blessings in disguise. Evil and sin may seem to have won victories, but we need to remember they are only temporary. Truth and righteousness will prevail. “In vain do earth and hell oppose, for God is stronger than His foes.”

Our Lord intent, is for us to remain faithful to Him and to our calling in life. It is our responsibility to do what He wants, wait patiently for Him to make whatever changes He wants possible, and then to go forward with humility, faith and effective action, knowing that God justifies our faith in Him. He will be glorified by His grace working through His servants in whatever trying time in which they are found.

## **GENESIS 40**

### **USEFUL WAITING TIMES**

Training times in a Christian’s life are when our convictions are formed and made real and personal to us. That is when our response to what we have been taught by trusted teachers, comes alive to us and we form our lasting commitments to yield to the Spirit of God, the word of God, and those to whom we are accountable. Teaching by trusted fathers in the faith is important because that defines the course of behavior in a believer’s life that our Lord intends us to follow. Also, it starts us off in a practical way, to living biblically and confidently. The Holy Spirit guides us through God’s word and we act upon that guidance. The time will come when we choose to make what we were taught, our own convictions, or to reject them. When we know who has taught us and trust them as truth-tellers, we will want to follow that guidance.

Joseph had learned of God and had come to know God early in life. He had developed moral and spiritual convictions relating to life and how it is to be lived in the sight of God. He did not want to “sin against God.” When he was in prison, there were imposed limitations on his physical activity over which he had no control, but his faith in God remained intact and his commitment to God was not diminished. His loyalty to God and his faithfulness to God was tested as to whether his inward convictions and loyalty was real when tested in a very restricted environment. His attitude was obvious honorable and positive in spite of the circumstances, which made him a young man to be trusted by the jailer. His convictions were in him and he lived them out in an adverse situation. He did not compromise his position as a person of faith.

When his feet were “hurt in the stocks,” likely when first imprisoned, he maintained his loyalty to God and was not one who complained to the those around him. He never lost his spiritual power by verbalizing the unfairness of his situation. His witness for God was never weakened by negative comments or a belligerent attitude. The normal attitude of prisoners is to respond in kind to the words and ways of others who are incarcerated, and to take an adversarial position against the jailers. How Joseph influenced the keeper of the prison is not stated, but we know it was because “The Lord was with Joseph,” that his influence for right was strong and obvious.

None of us lives to ourself and none of us die without leaving some kind of testimony behind, whether it be a good one or bad. When we are waiting for what we think God has in mind for us in the future, we need to remember that waiting times are also training times. Patience is best learned in adversity.

Some of the most important lessons we will learn in life are the small and seemingly simple ones that we face each day, or normal, ordinary, and often boring days. It is important for us to accept the training that comes with a quiet and confident attitude of gratitude, in the same way that we learn from the dramatic events in life.

**Working**, v.1-4. Important things happen when we hardly realize them as divine guidance. Two important men being put in prison would have brought about some special interest on the part of the whole prison population as well as the keeper of the prison. Joseph didn't seem to think the butler and the baker being there, was reason for him to show particular favor to them. He was under a higher authority than the king's men. At the same time, he likely could see the hand of God in each event whether it was large or small.

That is what being conscious of God being with us does for us. It keeps things of earth in the proper perspective. It makes us aware of the fact that God is in the small details of life as well as the large things, because He is working with those who are working for Him. Faithfulness to our duty is a testimony of our loyalty to the Lord. That can be a benefit to us having a positive influence on other people, but of greater benefit, is to the person who does what they do "as unto the Lord," being a happy or at least a contented person. When the joy of the Lord is real in us and to us, there is a wonderful sense of purpose, joy and the knowledge that we can glorify God "in our body and spirit which are His."

Injustice didn't make a difference to Joseph, at least outwardly, as he went about his work. There was no evidence of bitterness, but rather a quiet spirit and silent tongue in spite of the slander, misunderstanding and unfairness he was enduring. In our lives there are times when for us to speak would adversely affect our Christian witness and demean us personally. Silence in those times of injustice is a strength and testimony of our trust in God and of victory over our own self. Our convictions as believers, will not stand in the way of earthly promotions when we base them on the will of God and act accordingly. Many unbelieving businessmen will trust a Christian because they recognize loyalty to God means they will be loyal to the work they do daily because they do it as to the Lord.

**Watching**, v.5-19. "God speaks once, yea twice, and man perceives it not." However, when a child of God is in touch with God and willing to act in faith and fellowship with God, that person recognizes when God is at work in the lives of other people as well as in themselves. We are not called upon to be inquisitive whenever we see a person is in a dilemma, but it is quite in order to inquire when we see concern in a person; to ask whether we can help them. That is evidence of sincere concern, not the nosiness of a busy-body. Being cynical when a person seems troubled over a simple matter does not help them at all, and it does nothing positive for our own testimony as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Joseph was a young man who could be agreeable and capable at the same time. His ability did not interfere with his sincere humanity and interest in others. What he had learned at home in his youth about God, was solid in his heart and he remained true to God in spite of all he suffered from the various events in his life. Consequently, he invited the two troubled prisoners to tell him their dreams, and at the same time, testified that he didn't interpret dreams, but was simply the link between God who does interpret dreams and helps troubled souls.



When God is real to a person, He chooses to use to fulfill His will, that person is humbled to think that God be willing to use him or her. God can and will use us when we are available to Him! An attractive, amiable person has opportunities given to them by God because they are approachable and caring. It is important to retain one's integrity and personal honor, and yet not be lofty or high-minded toward others. Being superficial and trying to make one's self accepted by adapting the words, lifestyle, appearance and attitudes of others, does not have power to bring the change of attitude, repentance and faith that an unbeliever needs.

Differences, even in little things, reveal what is missing to those who know all is not well between them and God. Faithfulness to God and what we know to be true, and the courage to go upstream when the majority of people are going downstream, may cause a distance between people. This is essential when unbelievers realize their need of God. They see the difference between people of faith and themselves.

The conclusion of the incident when Joseph interpreted the two dreams, could have caused consternation in Joseph if he had not understood he was speaking for God. The favorable outcome for the butler and the death of the baker was not deviated from as he told them the meaning. He did not hide anything God said, in order to be accepted in himself. He was telling the truth from God. He did not add to the word of God nor did he take away from it. This is an important lesson for every watching witness for the Lord, to keep impressed on our hearts.

**Waiting**, v.20-23. When the butler left the prison, he must have expressed some appreciation to Joseph, but like so many people who are self-absorbed and self-centered, he forgot the one who had encouraged and assured him. How pathetic it is when ungrateful people "forget" the one who blessed them. For two more long and humiliating years, Joseph waited. In spite of being forgotten, we do not read of Joseph becoming bitter or reproachful against the butler.

When we realize God is in control and working out His will, waiting quietly is an expression of faith in God that will give us far greater satisfaction than getting our own way. Putting God first in one's life, strengthens character, develops wisdom and discernment, and helps to maintain our reputation with other people. When we nurture and feed our souls, our character is tended to and God will take care of our personal interests and what others think about us. Two years of being forgotten by men may seem like a long, wasted time, but in the whole scheme of life, it is not lost time. Waiting times really are training times for some of the major traits of Christian living. Patience, long-suffering, kindness, endurance and faithfulness are learned while waiting. The results will make it worth it all.

God's way is the wisest way to train us and fit us for our work in life. Training involves hardship and is not usually pleasant, but the experience and the process of discipline produces results that make us fit servants of the greatest of masters.

God's timing is best because he alone knows the end from the beginning. From home, to slavery, to prison must have seemed like something had gone wrong. Unless we are conscious that God is at work in us and through us, we can become discouraged by waiting. God is working out His divine plans and purposes to make people ready to serve Him as He wants, whether it is for four years or four-hundred

years as in the case of the children of Israel, who remained in Egypt until God knew they were ready to listen to Him.

God's grace is sufficient for us in spite of anything or everything that may come against us. Sympathy when others are in sorrow, cheerfulness in hardship, patience when hope is deferred, are all positive benefits to one's own self as well as others around us. By not allowing our spirit to be provoked when all does not go well, and remaining consistent, even when not acknowledged by others of being little worth, is possible by the grace of God. There is something about the grace of God being evident in a person, that produces a "perfect work" in us. When patience does its perfect work, a Christian witness is complete and full without any additions. Not a lot has to be said when we wait patiently on the Lord. Then we will be ready to do what He wants, when He wants.

## **GENESIS 41**

### **CHANGE MAY COME QUICKLY**

Time spent in isolation or being side-lined may seem like time wasted. The passing of time when one is in a situation over which they have no control, can be taken in two ways. One way is to be frustrated, over-anxious, discouraged, irritated and angry. The other is to consider the waiting times as times of training and preparation for things yet to come. The one view is a normal human respond to our own expectations, and the other is a testimony of our faith in God. It is then we are assured that "our times" are in God's hands. He will make plain His will in the most appropriate way at the most appropriate time.

Joseph was continuing to do his time in prison "as unto the Lord," as he went about the routines necessary to maintain prison order and life for those who were there. Then, without warning or opportunity to think about what happened so quickly, Joseph was urgently pressed to get ready and go to the highest person in Egypt – the Pharaoh. He was to appear before the Pharaoh right away and all he had time to do was to change his clothes and shave.

It is important that we live in conscious awareness that the next thing that may happen to us is for us to be quickly caught up into the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. There we will meet Him in the air, and everything of the past that seemed so important to us will seem like nothing. However, it is also important that we be ready for a sudden intervention in our life that will change everything we do from now on. It may be a person comes into our life who will affect the way we think and feel, or even what we believe. Incidents, accidents or illness can come quickly and they will change everything we are able to do. Events, good or bad, have the ability to change our lives and the lives of those around us in a very short time.

**The King's Dreams**, v.1-7. Not very much is written about Egypt before the writing of Moses, and the time of Joseph except for a brief reference to Abraham's short time there and a few other comments in the earlier parts of Genesis. In this account we read that Joseph shaved before going before Pharaoh. Egyptians were clean shaven while the sons of Jacob likely had facial hair. To adapt to that which is suitable in order be accepted, is not wrong as long as it doesn't go against a command of the Lord.

Dreams were one of the ways God got the attention of people in those ancient days. The fact that in Pharaoh's dream the cattle came out of the Nile River which was the source of Egypt's food supply, indicated to Pharaoh the dream he had was important. The hot dry wind also was significant because that "sirocco" could kill all vegetation. The meaning was obviously important to Pharaoh, in that it had to do with the needs and conditions for survival in that country.

**The Failure of the Magicians**, v.8. Deceit and misinformation were ways that clever and unscrupulous men made a place for themselves in idolatrous societies in the past. A little bit of common sense and an active imagination were all that were needed to create an illusion that those magicians were a "cut above" the rank and file. Similar people today are in politics, education and religion where they influence people by dogmatically saying what people want to hear. "Hucksters" are in a lot of areas of public life because they know most people will accept dogmatic statements without questioning the validity of what is said.

Deception will generally be exposed sometime, but much damage can be done which is very hard to undo for a long time. The tried and proven word of God gives us assurance that what God says can be relied upon to be the truth. When a person knows the truth, "the truth shall make you free." The ideas and explanations of men's opinions can be very deceptive.

**The Butler Remembers**, v.9-13. Urgent situations can bring to our minds past events and experiences that relate to present circumstances. There are certain things hidden in the human mind that trigger certain responses. For whatever reason, two years had passed without the butler having any recollection of Joseph. Then came the urgency of Pharaoh's dream and the butler remembered his own dream and that of the baker, and the results. The chain of events for two years did not awaken the butler, but that one simple link opened a whole new chapter in the life of Egypt, of Joseph and ultimately the children of Israel and the whole world.

To be conscious of God with us as we move through each day, will keep us ready and alert to act on God's revealed will. At His beckon, we need to take action without question. That happens when each day we commit ourselves to serving Him where we are, to the best of our ability. Then when the time comes that our Lord wants us to rise up and follow Him into some different place to do a different work, we are not hindered by a lot of baggage.

**The Call of Joseph**, v.14-16. A call can come quickly and unexpectedly when God opens a door for us. When we remember we are not our own but have been bought with a price, then we should not be surprised when an opportunity for divine service comes quickly. It is incumbent on us to be ready for some way to go beyond our normal activity and comfort zone, to fill a new role God has for us.

The monarch and the prisoner connected, and instead of Pharaoh considering Joseph a despised slave, he looked at him in the same way as he did the wise men and magicians of Egypt. The very first words of Joseph to Pharaoh revealed a marked difference between him and the other advisers. Joseph humbly and positively gave his testimony about the God he served. He was not too concerned about what would happen to him when he passed on the meaning of the dreams. He had already learned that was up to God. His concern was that God would be glorified and that Pharaoh would know there was a greater authority over Egypt than he.

To claim personal credit for something God does, should never cross our mind. In any victory, rescue, recovery or extra-ordinary event that turns out well, always GIVE GOD ALL THE GLORY! When we are living in conscious fellowship with God, it will be natural for a spiritual person to act and speak with integrity, respect and fearlessness to people – and reverence toward God.

**The Interpretation**, v.17-36. The similarity of the subject matter indicated the point of the two dreams had to do with the same matter, yet from two different points of view. The source of life that was full and plenty coming from the Nile, was going to be stopped. The favorable weather conditions needed to produce crops, would be dried up, and success and plenty would be gone.

Frankness of speech spoken with dignity and concern, has a powerful effect on those who hear a message. Balance with quiet firm counsel make those who listen, compelled to pay attention. We can learn from Joseph that humility and courage, diligence and integrity; dignity and conscientiousness are the characteristics we should demonstrate when we speak for God.

**The Reward**, v.37-40. Truth is its own defender. Counsel given in a clear concise and understandable way can be easily discerned. There are times when we hear a message given that is obvious to all who hear it, that the Spirit of God has been speaking through an appointed vessel. When the Spirit of God speaks through a man, there is power in the words as well as in the non-verbal forms of communication the messenger uses.

For thirteen years Joseph lived in Egypt in Potiphar's house and in the prison. Those years gave him a unique understanding of Egyptian life from the view of the high side of society to the lowest. With wisdom and tact learned during those training years, Joseph learned the needs of the nation and how they could be met. Sin defiles and dulls the morals and mentality of any people. When the Spirit of God works in a person, that person is cleansed, refined and clear-headed in their thinking.

To be soft-hearted does not mean a person has a better mental perception of the needs of the people. There is needed balance, far-sightedness, clearness of thought, honesty of speech and an awareness of what is going on around us, in order to actually meet the needs of the people. Moral and intellectual qualifications give a person credibility when they speak and/or deal with issues and problems. To define a problem concisely is about ninety percent of getting the right answer to problems.

Joseph had humility and wisdom when those things were joined to his management skills, his far-sightedness and his integrity. He was the obvious choice to take the lead in what needed to be done to prepare for the famine. He had been faithful in the small things, and consequently could be trusted to be faithful in the big things. Spiritual insight and spiritual gifts from God had been learned and used during the thirteen years of training. He didn't need to bargain to be released from prison. He had been trained by God through the circumstances of life, and was able to act with confidence and faith in God.

We all have a purpose in life. God knows who we are and has gifted and prepared us to fulfill that God-given role. The discipline of life lived in this world under adverse circumstances, prepares us to act on the education we received in the school of hard knocks. It is our duty in life to be loyal to our Lord, to be faithful to God, committed to the work He gives us, and holding fast to our integrity. The assurance of life is that nothing takes God by surprise. In His own time, He will make known to those who want to do His will, exactly what they are supposed to do for Him. Waiting time is training time,

and the glory of life is to know that God can use us to bring glory to our Lord as we serve Him by serving others.

### **FROM PRISON TO THE PALACE**

Following the life of Joseph in the scripture is a journey that takes us from the first seventeen years in his father's house, to thirteen years of bondage in Egypt, first in Potiphar's house and then in prison. Then in dramatic moment in one day, he goes from being a prisoner to the prime minister of Egypt. The road the sovereign God laid out before Joseph, reminds us that we too, on the road of our life, are not without guidance when we are children of God. Our sovereign Lord has a path of life and usefulness in which He has plans for us. It will include training times, testing time, good times and bad times. There is an objective and meaningful purpose in the life of every believer which will open up before as we live day by day in fellowship with Him.

To go from slavery to the second highest authority in the land of Egypt in one day, is beyond human design. The young man who was known for his faithfulness to God in spite of the circumstances of life in which he was found, was now ready to take God-given authority. A lesson for us to remember is that the small and seemingly insignificant things that happen in our lives, are allowed and even designed to teach, train and prepare us for other responsibilities that our sovereign Lord has for us. He knows the way we take every day. He knows our attitude toward disappointment and injustice that may be laid against us. It may take a long time before a servant of the Lord realizes that whatever we do, is to be done as "unto the Lord and not unto man."

When a person is able to discern the true state of affairs around us, and can see coming danger as a result of present conditions, that is important, but that is not all that is needed. To know what the problem is and to be able to define it, is evidence of a discerning person. To see the danger ahead, and to have the foresight to know how to prepare to deal with the problem that is coming appropriately, calls for wisdom. To actually be able to step ahead and implement that solution in the best possible way, needs a person who knows their need of divine intervention, and is willing to act on the word and will of God.

Joseph saw the coming danger, knew what was needed to deal with it, and had a specific plan as to how to go ahead and carry out that plan. His open, honest and straightforward explanations to Pharaoh, with his upright and non-apologetic way, impressed Pharaoh and all his advisors that this young man knew what he was talking about. He defined the problem, pointed out the consequences, gave the solution, and urged them to take action right away. He didn't complain about the unfairness of his past years of slavery, he didn't focus on himself or try to bargain to get a favorable outcome for himself.

He didn't grovel in humiliation before the highest authority in the country, but maintained his dignity as one who spoke for God. Joseph wisely and boldly used the power that God gave him. His testimony about God was clear. God gave Pharaoh the dream, God had decided the famine was coming, God was going to carry out His plan soon and action had to be taken right away. There was no question as to Joseph's conviction that what was going to happen was exactly as he stated. He didn't let injustice and the cruelty that had been shown to him, create a spirit of revenge in him. He had accepted what had been done to him with submission. The time of training and preparation was over in one day. Now was the time to take action.

His appointment was immediate and definite. The circumstances of his life changed at once, but the grace God had shown to him and taught him, and the power of God used through him, made Joseph the man he was. That had prepared him to take the great leap from being a slave to being a person with great authority, without any hesitation. He had learned a lot through the thirteen years of training, and it stood him in good stead.

Our experiences with God, and the lessons we learn from God through His word; circumstances in our lives and things we learn from other people, prepare us to do what God wants. It is up to us to go forward in faith without hesitation when we know what the will of God is. Where we live, what we have actually learned, who we associate with, what we do with what we know, and our attitude toward God and other people, all make it important that we understand the fact that God makes us capable to do what He wants from us.

Joseph's life changed quickly, and Joseph did not hesitate to go to work right away. To deal with the problem of the coming famine with which he was faced, he had to know what assets he had that could meet the difficulties that he faced. On a journey through the whole country, the nation was warned ahead of time, and the solution was given. He could identify all the assets in the nation that he could use, and then he would know how best to use them. He came to a conclusion as to how to prepare for and then overcome, the obstacles famine would bring.

He also had a new personal life as a married man, and then becoming the father of two sons. The training time had taught him how to deal with a variety of personalities with whom he lived and to be able to maintain his own identity and yet live at peace with others when possible. He had learned how to deal with change and how to take advantage of what God had entrusted to him. Prosperity and an active new way of life didn't change his character, but it likely would have made the bitter disappointments of the past thirteen years, mere memories of lessons learned, grief endured and divine deliverance. He would have learned that he needed God's grace more in times of prosperity and responsibility, than in times of slavery and incarceration.

God's sovereign plans for us will be learned when we do the small things entrusted to us in the best way we can, because those essential things that are "working for our good," will open doors to larger things. God will give to those servants who have experienced and yielded to divine direction in His service, larger more important things to accomplish for His sovereign purposes. God's righteousness does not depend on what we think is right, but in how He chooses to use those who honor and obey Him. Things that once seemed small, will be revealed to us as part of the big picture of the overall work of God.

As we rest in God's wisdom being unfolded to us and through us, we realize that He has been working on us all along, in good times and bad, to make us usable and profitable in the work of the kingdom of God. Then we will be made conscious of God's grace being demonstrated in our weakness. We will find that His grace is sufficient for our needs, and it also teaches us how to be balanced persons. We will be able to see people and events through spiritual and sanctified insight instead of the uncertainty of human wisdom and perspective.

When God is real to us in our daily lives and we "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," our Lord Jesus Christ will be first in our interests and hopes for this day and for the

future. There will be dark times when His Light will give more clear guidance to us than we could get through the light of our own understanding. When the heat is on and we are not sure how much more we can take, He is there as our cloud by day and fire by night. He keeps us, empowers us, supports us and uses us so our lives can be a blessing to Him and others. Hopefully, we will give a little fragrance of our Lord Jesus Himself, to others who don't know Him, but know we belong to Him and love Him.

## **GENESIS 42**

### **AWAKE... ARISE!**

In the on-going history of Joseph, and the many types and fore-shadows of Christ we see in the narrative of his life, this chapter is like a prophetic view of the time when the risen Lord Jesus Christ will be seated on the throne of David and rule as the King of kings. The nation of Israel that had rejected our Lord Jesus as a people, will be brought to face Him and will realize that Jesus, who they rejected, is the true Messiah. Kingdom blessing will follow as God's chosen people, will be blessed and they will see the whole world blessed by the One who was promised to the patriarchs in ancient times, who would bring blessing to all the nations of the world.

For our learning, it is a good thing to ask ourselves, "When do we learn important lessons best? In the good times or in the bad?" Most of us will say we learn best when the problems of life are faced personally and we realize something has to be done about the present situation in which we are found. We can easily get used to taking blessings from God for granted when times are good. Our minds and hearts become gradually hardened by thinking this is the way things should be and I deserve all of this, and we accept all God gives as if it is our right. Really, we do not deserve the least of God's mercies.

We likely won't realize at first what is happening to us. We can get so used to prosperity and ease, that we think that is normal. Then tragedy comes, or circumstances change our situation or status entirely from what we had become used to. This is one of the ways God uses to soften hard hearts and makes us realize what we really need, we cannot supply. In times of need and sorrow, the God of all grace draws near to us. He doesn't refuse to help us even though we have been in a measure, distanced from Him, or at least lost the joy of intimacy with our Lord. We experience closeness when we come to Him with gratitude, for the new life He has given us, and the communion we have with Him when we allow no barriers or separations.

For twenty years Joseph's brothers had lived prosperous, and likely comparatively easy, lives with plentiful blessings from God around them. Joseph was probably only thought of by them occasionally and not with sorrow. What he would have had, as the "coat of many colors" implied, would someday be passed on to one of them was likely in their dark minds – and then God stepped in!

Divine authority has the power to stop the whole world from spinning, let alone overcome human complacency in a very short time. When God's people forget who He really is and who they really are, they become like the world around. Then when hardships and difficulties arise, we are so out of touch with God, the inclination is to turn to the ways of the world for solutions. The problem is those answers don't even deal with the source of the problem, nor can they. Sin has wages that must be paid.

Jacob at least, had his senses about him and took the place of authority, even though he was an old man. In essence he told his sons, “Get up and do something! Don’t just sit there wondering where we are going to get food! There’s grain in Egypt! Go there and buy us some food!”

When we are deceived into thinking success and plenty will always be here, complacency soon becomes apathy. We don’t want anything to disturb our peace so we look for someone to do something for us. People know how to complain about the state of affairs and the perceived injustice that we think is being done to us. “Why doesn’t someone do something about all of this,” is a common complaint. It is not right for us to expect others to do for us that which we can do for ourselves. Planning and waiting have to give way to waking up out of an apathetic stupor, and rising up to take action and deal with the problems we face.

**The Journey**, v.1-5. When Jacob knew there was “corn in Egypt,” and he informed his adult sons of that fact, he was not likely telling them what they did not know. The thought of going to Egypt would have brought guilt to their consciences as they were reminded of having sold Joseph as a slave to Egypt. “Memory like an adder stinging, all the guilty past upbringing...” What they had wanted to forget, and had hoped had come to an end, still was there. They had deliberately sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver. Trying to avoid taking action, they had hesitated, were plagued with indecision and perplexed as to how to meet the obvious need of their families. Jacob’s demand made those ten men go down to Egypt and they were forced to recall events of their own making twenty years earlier. They didn’t know what was before them, and it was good they didn’t, or they would have probably turned around rather than face what was ahead of them.

It is a mercy of God that we don’t know what the future holds for us here. As believers in Christ, we can look beyond the grave to our eternal future, but God graciously keeps hidden from us what tomorrow, next week, or next year may hold. One step at a time is enough for us to take, even though we do make plans and qualify them by saying, “The Lord willing we shall do this or that.” During the course of daily living, God gives us the time we need to learn the spiritual meaning of events when we are exercised about it, and also gives a glimpse of the significance of each event. Looking back at what we have experienced in trials, we will see the value of the “famine” in light of the big picture as God sees it.

**The Meeting**, v.6-25. When Joseph saw his brothers, he knew them but they didn’t recognize him. He would have appeared as a strong, grown man in the prime of life. He would have been smooth shaven like was the common practice of Egyptian men. He was also a man of great authority over the affairs of a great country. Joseph spoke in the Egyptian language, dressed like an Egyptian man of authority, and instead of being a seventeen-year-old boy, he was a thirty-seven or thirty-eight-year-old man.

Some things are more important than those which are natural and normal to us. To bring about the restoration of soul that is needed in those who have become used to sin, is not accomplished in a short time. Reality takes a while to set in, and it takes a long time to honestly face reality. Character can and should be tested, to determine if change for the better has actually taken place, or if apparent humility and respect is a means to get what is wanted.

Joseph wasn’t “getting back” at his brothers by remaining unknown to them. He was following the tried and proven principles for discerning true restoration. He wanted to restore their souls, not exalt



himself, and he set about to do this for their own sake. If he had revealed himself to them right away, he would have acted in weakness and the outcome would have been far different than the blessing God wanted to give. In a way, he was “washing their feet,” like our Lord did for His disciples.

People defiled by the world, guilty in their hearts, with a bad conscience; need to find a place of cleansing, healing and restoration, even though they may not know it. The restoring of one’s soul is usually a humbling and painful process. The conscience has to be dealt with and stirred into action. Personal feelings can melt and be tender for a short time unless it is motivated by true love. True love is firm and serves with patience, until the ground that has hardened the heart has been softened by rain from heaven and disturbed by events that happen around us.

An awakened conscience is like a tree shaken by a strong wind whose leaves are moved by the force of the wind and the sound of change is heard. Kindness and roughness go together when an alarm needs to be sounded. When there is danger, or change must be made, it is a favor when the sleep of worldliness is disturbed and the need of immediate change makes one arise and take action.

Joseph’s testing time of his brothers, didn’t go right at the problem face on, but he took his time and went the long way around to get to the desired result in the shortest possible way. The charge he made to them of being spies, was a way to get them to honestly own up to who they were before the governor of a nation. There could no equivocating. Their earnest answer was quite significant. “Twelve brothers” were in the family circle, with one young one home and one considered dead. They didn’t lie or deceive on that point.

In spite of what Joseph knew to be true, he let them understand he was not yet ready to take their word as true about everything. He demanded proof of their sincerity and truthfulness. To enforce his word, he had them all put in prison for three days where they would consider who they were, what they were like before others as well as themselves, why they were there and how to respond to convince the governor of them telling the truth. Joseph had been in prison himself, so he knew what it was like to not be able to do or say what you want. He had been tried and proven himself, and wanted his brothers to know what deception would bring.

When he had them brought out of prison after three days, he made a deliberate statement to them that he knew would mean a lot, so they would face who they really were. “I fear God!” would have put the fear of God into them who had ignored divine authority over their lives. That plain statement and a different proposal that gave a glimmer of hope to them, showed that grace was being shown in spite of who they were. Grace as well as tough love, made them open their mouths to express what their consciences had been hiding. Joseph knew what they were saying when they admitted to their guilt, even though it was only to themselves. That was a first step.

Our consciences move us to admit to guilt when sin is brought before us, but to admit to guilt does not indicate a change of mind and heart. True repentance does start in the conscience when we admit to our own guilt. Memory also plays a part in repentance as we recall the sins we committed and the consequences of sin, plus the anguish it can bring to others beside ourselves. It is then we begin to reason as to what is happening to us and why. But even then, restoration does not necessarily take place.

A change had taken place in them, but Reuben still tried to justify himself before them even though he had done nothing. Of a positive note was the fact that they acknowledged Joseph as their “brother.” When he was a young boy, they spoke of him disparagingly as the “dreamer.” They finally recognized their own position and condition, and Joseph heard that and knew they had been awakened, so he wept. Joseph’s true feelings toward his brothers was also seen in giving them back their money, and each one was treated equally. Whether it was another test is not made plain, but the fact that he gave them back what was theirs was a marked difference from what they did when they sold him for twenty pieces of silver.

Injustice will be shown up for what it is sometime. Most of us have experienced it in one way or another, but feeling slighted does not give us the right to be spiteful toward those who are unfair or unjust. We can learn from Joseph that attacks against our character, against false charges and being overlooked and forgotten, does not give us the right to try and get vengeance or right the wrongs. To forgive, is what our Lord Jesus told us to do, even if time after time we are sinned against.

**The Return**, v.26-38. Finally, after God being missing from their lives as far as the written record is concerned; when those men found the money in each of their sacks, they admitted they were far from God, and were forced to face the fact that God had found them out. Conscience had done its work, but the money in their sacks took them way beyond their pricks of conscience, to where their lives were in danger, and they knew that. They had been brought to face the fact that God knew them and was against them. They were “enemies of God by wicked works.” That left them no place to escape the divine dealing of God. It is no different for us. The justice and holiness of God leaves us no place to hide from Him.

By nature, our moral character is such that we do not want to think of God, or face Him, or even be willing to openly and verbally acknowledge Him as Lord. When emergency situations arise, it is not uncommon for even total unbelievers to call on God to help them. It is then people are inclined to make resolutions to change their behavior and try to become more righteous. But without being born again and having a new nature imparted to us, such resolve gradually fades away.

Joseph’s brothers had fear instilled in them by his attitude toward them, and even more so by them thinking his generosity in returning their money, was a way to accuse them of stealing. Even when they got to Jacob and told them what happened, they did not lie to him this time like they did twenty years earlier. Jacob himself had lost any vital kind of faith and responded with fatalism. He was not acting as Israel, but still the old Jacob. It never entered his mind that God was working for him directly. Like Jacob, we can be short-sighted when we look at events through the mindset of a person of the world, rather than a believer who has learned to trust in our unfailing God.

Reuben made a noble offer when he offered his two sons if Benjamin was not brought back after the next journey to Egypt. But Jacob refused to allow Benjamin to go even though it was in the best interests of the whole family and all associated with it. His only interest was in himself. It is possible for us to hinder the work of God and the spiritual advancement of believers if we are self-centered and ignore the fact that God’s love and grace have been shown to us time and again.

God’s divine purposes are all in the plans he has for our lives. Each and every event He allows, has a reason that is known to Him. We must learn to trust Him and not doubt nor fail in our responsibilities.

Rather than acting in faith, if we have concentrated our efforts on methods that we think will work best for us, or principles and laws of men that we hold on to, we simply must “Let go and let God” do what is His will through us.

When we respond to God’s love with gratitude and thanksgiving, we will find that human love and affection is made stronger. Patience, persistence and personal sacrifice for the benefit of others, will be forthcoming. Then the power of a guilty conscience will bring a person to where they are brought to true repentance. Remorse and sorrow can change a person’s view of the past, but that doesn’t really mean anything if the same sin is repeated.

Joseph had to know that the minds of his brothers were not only changed by their sense of guilt for what they had done in the past, but also there was an honest resolve to do what was right in the future. Repentance is a change of mind in regard to the past, and it is also a change of will in regard to the future.

Human reasoning can bring serious mistakes when we only look at events, people, calamities and failures. When we are at an end of ourselves, we are more than willing to look up to God and think beyond the present circumstances, to the One who holds everything in his mighty hand of power. When we put our faith in the Lord, and see His goodness and mercy that has supplied us with all we need, we will not find ourselves complaining about not getting what we want. He is faithful to us and it is only right that we commit our way to Him to direct our path in life and use the events in life to bring the results He wants according to His sovereign will.

## **GENESIS 43-44**

### **THE SECOND JOURNEY**

When a person has chosen to go away from his own people like Judah when he moved away from his family, how are we to act toward them when they return? We don’t know what happened when Judah came back after having spent time with his friend Hirah, the Adulamite, but it seems like he returned with a greater appreciation for his father and family than when he left. As this whole story develops, Judah steps up and begins to take family leadership by showing initiative and a change of attitude. Reuben was weak and even though he was the oldest son, he did not have leadership qualities.

There are those who for some reason decide they want a more comfortable, friendly and less restrictive fellowship, who leave and go where they can more or less do what they want. Usually, they want to go to a place where there are a lot more people and where there is no accountability. They can attend the religious gathering when they want to and no one knows whether they are there or not. If they want to go to the beach or attend a ballgame instead of meeting with the church, no one will ask where they were or why they were not at the meetings. Their God-given gifts are unused and they can live like the unbelievers around them without any “reproach” associated with them being a Christian.

How thankful we are when occasionally someone returns to the “church-home” they left with a different attitude and a desire to please God by doing what He wants where He wants them. Some have become better witnesses for the truth than when they left. In some cases, they have been raised up

by the Holy Spirit to help lead God's people. The training time followed the time of discipline and correction.

In these two chapters there is quite a lot of detail given as the Spirit of God teaches us some principles regarding the restoration of a broken relationship within a family. To ignore the cause of division is to leave a festering sore that will likely create further problems later. With love for his brothers, Joseph patiently waited for the right time to go farther than he had on the previous journey they made to Egypt. He knew the famine would continue and that his brothers would have to come back for provisions and to get Simeon who remained in prison. He also anticipated seeing Benjamin who he insisted they bring with him when they returned.

The book of Genesis is full of teaching regarding how God looks upon people and deals with the fallen human condition. His desire always has been to have a companionship with people who would love Him and want to be with Him and share life forever with their Creator in a meaningful way. Man's sin changed that, and so in this book God deals with our lost innocence and guilty conscience. Delegated authority of a government designed by humans without taking into account the moral depravity of each human heart, did not advance morality and peaceful living. Even when promises were made, failure was the result because of our sinful human nature. In this part of the narrative, all of human failure is evident. It is a view of the life of one family that gives us a review of the whole religious history of humanity up until this point.

Jacob was still the old schemer who was acting like his old self, by putting blame on others for not going to Egypt for more grain which was the main staple of that day. He knew his sons had told him they could not go back to Egypt without Benjamin, but he was still only thinking about himself and what he wanted. This is a common human character trait. "Me first" should not be the attitude of those who belong to God. We who know the Lord, have been given a new nature in which it is characteristic to say, "Lord, what will You have me to do?"

### **DIVINE DISCIPLINE**

**The Great Need**, 43:1-14. Judah by this time had become the spokesman for his brothers and the preeminent leader among them. That would remain for generations and it was through Judah that the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah" would come. Our Lord Jesus Christ would prevail over evil and defeat the power of Satan by His death on the cross. It was through the tribe of Judah, the ancestor who offered himself as a surety for his youngest brother Benjamin, the Savior would come into the world. With plainness of speech, Judah told Jacob his father they would not go to Egypt without Benjamin.

There are times when we face difficulties and pointed questions, that need pointed and straightforward answers. To equivocate only prolongs the problem. No matter what people might say or who they try to blame, wait until they have said all they wanted to complain about, and then go directly to the problem, state the facts. Deal with the problem by clearly giving the only sensible answer to the matter. The shrewd sneaky way of Jacob, didn't intimidate Judah who knew the details of the whole matter and had made them clear to Jacob before.

Do not get belligerent when challenged, but seriously make an appeal, urge that action be taken to deal with the matter, make any promises you can honestly make to bring about the solution to the whole issue. Then stand firm with confidence that the course that needs to be taken is the right one. Jacob got

beyond his self-centered emotion to the place of common sense and consented to let Benjamin go. He also knew that “a man’s gift makes room for him.” A gift shows appreciation, respect and promotes fellowship between people. A conscious awareness of “God Almighty” as the One who grants mercy, lets us see that Israel was back acting as a prince with God should.

**The Unusual Reception,** v.15-34. It would have given Joseph great joy to see his full brother Benjamin, now as a grown man standing before him. Rather than quickly responding as one’s emotion is inclined to do, he chose to show them hospitality at his house, even though he had to have a brief time alone to weep when he saw Benjamin. For those men to have been received at Joseph’s house, was a remarkable change from the prison house of their first journey. The fear of those older brothers is understandable as they are brought into the house, where they quickly confessed that they had found their money in their sacks.

A matter can often be quickly put to rest when we are willing to be open and honest. Equivocation and lengthy explanations often cloud an issue to the extent that all the words make a listener think maybe there is something hidden. The steward did not lie because he had the money and after, put it in their sacks. He was aware of God and His authority even though he was likely an Egyptian idolater. Added to all the uncertainties of the nine brothers was that Simeon was released from prison, and they were all seated at a special table in the order of their ages. That was obviously not a coincidence, but they had no explanation as to how it happened. No wonder they were all nervous and fearful.

When Joseph appeared, just like he had dreamed years before, his brothers all “bowed down to the earth.” When God reveals His will to us, He doesn’t always make it plain to us when it will take place. It is our responsibility to seek His will and be ready to do it at any time. It may be harder to wait until the appointed time to carry it out than to take action right away. When the time is made plain to us to act on what we know is the will of the Lord, there is no reason to wait for a more convenient time for us. Take action on God’s timing.

Joseph recognized his full brother, Benjamin as “his mother’s son.” There was a special pull at his emotions when the brother he knew as a child, was now a grown man right in front of him. Emotion cannot always be avoided, and it is not necessarily wrong. But to take action based on emotion can hinder the appropriate conclusion of a matter. Joseph dealt with his emotions in private and then went back to carry out his planned testing of their change, to see if it included a changed character as well as a changed attitude. The fears the brothers had when they were in prison and their confession previously, was in contrast with the feast and the merriment they enjoyed at Joseph’s house. How confusing that must have been!

Some things we learn in times of stress and fear, and then when the stress is gone, and pleasure and satisfaction come as a result of a problem being solved, if the lessons was not really learned, we will go back to being the same as before. Wisdom learns the lessons, and benefits from problems and difficulties. Self-centeredness forgets the lessons when the tensions are gone and a person whose character has not changed reverts to the same condition as before. How can we know the difference between real change and temporary conversion?

**The Testing Plan,** 44:1-17. The enjoyable meal was over, the brothers had a night’s rest. Their sacks we filled with grain and by daybreak they were on their way out of town likely giving each other “high

fives,” as they left for home. They were all there including Simeon and Benjamin. What a relief and homecoming that would be!

Joseph’s God-given wisdom went a step further than putting their money back in their grain sacks. When Joseph’s cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. Their hearts must have almost stopped. He could be killed for that, and they had even offered that response themselves. Until a person focuses on their own sin and with their own lips admits their own guilt before God, changes are only superficial. When fear is because of what is around us, then if we are removed from that which causes fear, we are no longer afraid. When there is fear in us because we know what is in us, that fear will never leave until it is faced, repented of, dealt with in a just way and the cause is removed.

The protests of innocence were so ready, that the brothers were willing to have one of them die. We can imagine what came over them all when the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. They had condemned him to die themselves, just like they had done to Joseph his brother, over twenty years before. All the outward show, fear, professed honesty and expressions of guilt faded as they were exposed for who they really were.

Falling down in the agony of honest guilt and fear, they finally confessed through Judah the spokesman, “God has found out the iniquity of your servants.” They were all ready to go into slavery because of their guilt. Joseph knew that self-pity was not far enough to bring the needed change, He would have nothing to do with their proposal that they would all become his slaves. Perhaps he just wanted to keep Benjamin in Egypt with him for a time. He may have needed to see if they were willing to sacrifice Benjamin the way they had him years before.

**The True Intercession**, v.18-34. A great change had happened to Judah. Over twenty years before he had been the one to suggest they sell Joseph to the Midianites. Then he lied to his father about what had happened. Now, he offered to become a slave in order to free Benjamin and to spare his father the sorrow of losing the child of his old age. With simplicity, Judah told the whole story of his father, his family, the loss of Joseph and the grief that would come to Jacob if Benjamin didn’t return. He was prepared to sacrifice himself for Benjamin.

The whole story Judah told, calls to our attention that there was a change of character in Judah and perhaps to a degree in his brothers. They had shortly before said the guilty person would be killed on the spot to clear the rest, but now they were all conscious of their own guilt. They were united, docile and ready for whatever God would do. Divine discipline does have to run its course until the desired result is reached.

We are able to recover and gain a victory through faith like happened to Jacob, even after our doubts and fears have us looking on the dark side of things. The power of fear can claim our whole attention when we don’t know what is ahead and also when things don’t turn out the way we had hoped. Fear can cause us to despair, or it can drive us to God in faith. The fear of the Lord makes us turn away from sin and makes us to want to be true to Him.

Ongoing discipline is needed in our moral and spiritual training. The problem of sin has to be confessed and forsaken before we can worship the Father in spirit and in truth. We are able to be useful to the Lord when we are conscious of our own limitations and unworthiness of God’s mercy.

With us, like with Joseph's brothers, it is natural for us to be tested as to our moral and spiritual condition, even when we are not aware of what is happening. An ordinary act on an ordinary day, can be a test to see whether we are watchful and aware of potential danger like the three hundred men with Gideon. By being consistent before our family or faithful in our duties as an employee, is a test of which we might not be aware. Even giving thanks for our food when we are alone is a test as to the reality of our Christian character. A child of God is always on duty and can be an unconscious influence for good and for God.

There is a danger if we misunderstand what God is doing with us. We need to commit ourselves each day to walk in the light so we can be "partakers" of the holiness of our Lord. Chastisement is not always punishment. Discipline is not always punitive but is for our learning. The Lord chastens who He loves. Fellowship with Him makes us understand the difficulties and trials of life through which we pass. The conditions that bring spiritual blessings will begin with repentance for sin. When that barrier is removed, faith has a fertile field in which to grow. Character is deepened when we face the fact that God is working in us, training us and transforming us into the person He wants. Spiritual character that doesn't shrink from hardship and discipline, is one in which grace and wisdom is able to be shown. Then when a person praises God and worships Him, it is with a full heart and not a form or sense of holding anything back from Him.

## **GENESIS 45**

### **RECONCILIATION**

After Judah's appeal to Joseph on behalf of Benjamin and his father Jacob, and with no self-centered appeal for himself or his brothers, there was really nothing more that needed to be said or done. The tests Joseph had put them through had finally brought about the change of attitude and heart needed for reconciliation to take place. The parting had happened and that could not be changed. But the hearts of Joseph's brothers had finally changed, and even his own heart had to leave the past and move forward.

Now the time for reconciliation had come! Like in the parting, the hearts of all involved are exposed for what they were, so in reconciliation, a tenderness reveals the change of heart. Fears give way to tears. Distance gave way to the closeness of the embraces of repentance and forgiveness. The comparison of Joseph and Jesus is very evident here. Both were persecuted unjustly. Both were separated from their brothers for a while. Both forgave and restored their repentant brothers.

The relationship between Joseph was restored with the plain words, "I am Joseph!" He did not leave them terrified by a long pause to let their guilt sink in and become despairing at that revelation, but quickly added what he already knew was true. Giving them a point of relief and of common ground, he asked, "Does my father yet live?" The explanation he gave of divine sovereignty overruling their separation for over twenty years, was that God had sent him ahead of them, so they would be able to survive the famine.

How like our Lord Jesus he was, who came to make it possible for us to have eternal life and live with Him forever! Conviction of our sin against God was real. Our consciences made us stop and seek the Lord. The One who had already suffered for our sins before we even came to Him, was there to receive us when we finally came in repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He had already been crucified in our place and suffered the bitter consequences of our sin. He died for us fulfilling every legal requirement that our sin demanded. In His resurrection, He brought us into a whole new life.

Joseph's brothers and their families all began a new life with Joseph and were spared the awful consequences of the famine. He told them he would provide for them so they would have all they needed because of his gracious provision. The joy of reconciliation continued and led to communion between them. The impact of this reconciliation was evident to those who had no part in it, but were affected by it, and could see the joy and power of it. In an unprecedented move, Pharaoh opened the land of Goshen to Joseph's family without any hesitation. When the Sovereign Lord rules, even kings obey Him. This account of reconciliation is one of the most touching and beautiful illustrations of God's grace that we read of in the Bible.

### **BLESSINGS FROM RECONCILIATION**

**The Revelation**, v.1-8. Reconciliation is able to take place when one who has been rejected is able to discern a change of attitude and heart in those who did the offense that brought separation. Brevity, reality, forthrightness and love are all part of what makes reconciliation possible. Hesitation and fear may be evident until the facts of the circumstances that led up to this are made plain. God was behind this event and all that led up to it. There was no reproach or demands made. The bigger picture of things as seen from God's eyes was described and accepted. When we can see God working His will, and the reason for what has happened, reconciliation can then take place.

**The Commission**, v.9-13. Joseph's position in Egypt gave him the authority to give directions and make things happen. He was not ashamed of his father or his brothers, nor did he lay any charges or complaints. When we know what needs to be done and can do it, or at least set about to make it happen, then it is our right and responsibility to take action.

To preserve unity and promote stability, security and safety, we need to make sure that all is provided. Nothing is trivial when it comes to restoring and maintaining the dignity, honor and respect for our Lord. We may not always be conscious of what is important, so to make sure very need is met, we pray, prepare and press ahead to the objective before us.

Encouragement for others to participate in a work may be accepted and acted upon when we can give a verbal explanation of the goal to be reached. If possible, visible evidence, like the wagons were to Jacob, add to the assurance that what is being proposed has already begun to happen. People are inclined to participate in something that is already started, not just talked about. Even more than just a tangible and visible project, is the spiritual and non-material elements involved that will have a lasting effect in life, and even eternal value.

**The Reconciliation**, v.14-15. Joy and open expression of relief and acceptance accompany reconciliation. Those responsible for failure, injury and grief will have enough remorse and personal hurt, that there is no need of going back over things that have been talked about and dealt with. There



is a time to face and deal with a matter, and then move on without looking back. Promote good-will, not a rehash or “second-guess” of that which is past and done.

**The Journey Back**, v.16-24. What a difference the return journey from Egypt to Hebron was! The Pharaoh knew the kind of man Joseph was and he didn't hesitate to welcome Joseph's father and brothers because of his respect for Joseph. Courtesy is not out of style for those who appreciate God and His people. We need to be looking out for the welfare of others.

It is not always easy to accommodate to new situations and potential conflicts can arise if we are not careful. They generally are over some small matters, but it well for us to keep our eyes open for anything that can be misconstrued or may be a stumbling block to others. Those small things have the potential of marring fellowship with each other. When things in a new place are not what we are used to, it may take some time to fit in and accept those things that are strange or different to us. Look for those things that are positive and open new thoughts and vistas, rather that focus attention of the things that are different and if allowed to dwell on, will make us edgy and unhappy.

**The Result**, v.25-28. When things are not what we expect, there is a natural tendency to believe there is a hidden agenda, or something is not right about the whole matter. That is when we need unmistakable confirmation of the rightness of a matter. Jacob saw Simeon and Benjamin with his other sons, and he was satisfied. But he didn't believe the words he was told.

It is reasonable to expect that there are proofs of a statement that at first seem unbelievable. Faith in what people say is far different than faith in God. When we believe God's word, we are on the solid ground of tried and proven promises, as well as centuries of historical accuracy and fulfillment of prophetic words. We can go forward into the unknown areas of life, knowing that God is with us, for us, in us and is wanting to use us in ways we never thought of before.

The revelation of divine direction unfolds to us the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ like Joseph was revealed to his brothers. God has a purpose in life for every child of His. His love for us may not always make us feel good, but divine love conquers fears, blesses us and stoops down to use us frail mortal creatures for a purpose higher than we could have ever thought about. The method of divine revelation may be so foreign to us that we are not sure if we are discerning correctly what is happening. In the spiritual realm of life, much of what we know is very personal. It is hard to explain to others the confidence we have in God's guidance to do a certain thing or go to a distant place. Devotion to Christ and a willingness to yield to what His word teaches us, is real to us even though it may not be to others.

The power of divine revelation is the assurance that our Lord is in control of everything. When we are conscious of God with us, our fears go away, our self-confidence fades into faith in our Lord alone to accomplish His goals for us. In grace, He gives us new ideas, new hopes and new courage so we don't feel that we have to do what we know we are not capable of doing. Our trust and full confidence are in our Lord Jesus who has “all power in heaven and in earth.”

The outcome of divine revelation is God works in us to bring to Him that which He wants for His glory, for the benefit of His people and for us. God brought peace and reconciliation to Joseph and his brothers. He promised protection and guaranteed provision to meet their needs in the time of famine.

He does that for us in the normal course of life when we are hardly conscious of it, and He also supplies what we need in times of emergency.

There is given to us responsibility when divine revelation is given. We are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. We are to tell others of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners. We are to testify to the Living Lord Jesus who is coming again. We are to make known His position of authority as the Supreme Ruler of the universe and the Judge of all the earth. We are to make known to others that He receives any and all who will come to Him in faith. The kind of life we live, the attitudes we have and the consistency of our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is how we are able to let it be known to all around us, "Jesus is alive!"

## **GENESIS 46**

### **RESETTLEMENT**

After reconciliation takes place, a whole new vista of life opens to those who have been reconciled. Restoration follows reconciliation and times of refreshing and restitution come when conversion brought by repentance is real. Jacob begins to act like Israel and is willing to go to Egypt as a dignified old man who is respected by his family and even the Pharaoh of Egypt. He and his family were able to settle in an area of Egypt that was separate from the mainstream of Egyptian life. Yet, it was the best land they could hope for to feed their flocks and herds. Their needs could be met in Goshen. They had left behind all that was not essential and were able to take of the good of the land before them.

When God's people realize who they are before God, and do not seek to conform to the ways, habits and religious activities of the world, we will be able to be partakers of the "good of the land" that belongs to our Lord and King. Believers in Christ may be an "abomination" to the world system around us, but our "heavenly Joseph" is not ashamed to call us "brethren." He calls His people by His name, and we say of Him, "The Lord is my God."

Our inheritance in our Lord Jesus Christ is before us, and we have to claim it for ourselves. Then we can use it, promote it and display it as our Christian heritage and testimony, and labor to preserve it in its unchangeable integrity. Our Lord is the One who preserves life on all the earth and He maintains the orderliness of it so we can be blessed by it and use it to bless others. Disorder caused by selfishness and the imposition of human will and design on the life God gives, will create chaos, dysfunction and ultimate failure. Life maintained by the power of God is a blessing to all. The redemption our Lord Jesus bought with His own precious blood includes more than the redemption of our souls. In a day to come, creation itself will be reconciled to God and the earth will give forth from its fullness to meet the need that mankind has. There will be no more famine. Like the family of Jacob because of the Joseph, we begin a new walk by faith with a new life, with a new character and new desire as our Lord's purchased possession that stands in the grace of redemption. This is a mere foretaste of millennial blessings yet to come when there will finally be peace on earth.

In the unfolding story of Israel's four-hundred years in Egypt beginning with the journey of Israel's family to Egypt to be with Joseph; Asenath, Joseph's wife is not mentioned. She is a type of the church which is the bride of Christ and is a heavenly people whose life is bound up in our Lord Jesus

Himself, not in the millennial blessings that will come to God's chosen earthly people the Jews. We are seen in Christ, not in any way separated from Him.

The journey to Egypt began a four-hundred-year sojourn away from the promised land for the children of Israel. Jacob went to Egypt with his sons and their families, and would leave as a nation. Those silent years were a preservation from the idolatry of the people of Canaan. However, as the generations passed, the children of Israel became servants to the gods of the Egyptians "who were on the other side of the flood."

When they finally left centuries later and came back to the promised land, some were inclined to serve "the gods of the Amorites." It is possible for those who have turned away from the world and the ways of the world, to see their own children and their descendants turn back to what we left. It is our responsibility to live before the Lord in faith and commitment to Him and His word. We do not have the authority or capability to make our children and grandchildren commit themselves to the Lord. He must be their own personal Savior and Lord in order for them to be saved from the eternal slavery of sin and its consequences.

### **GOD GAVE JACOB CLEAR GUIDANCE**

**The Journey**, v.1-7. For years Jacob had settled in Canaan and experienced the stability and security that likely would have given him a measure of contentment. The grave of Rachel wasn't far away and he had memories and strong ties to Hebron. The promise of the land God gave to Abraham and Isaac had also been given to him. To leave that place and go to Egypt would have been difficult for him. When he stopped at Beersheba on the way, to offer sacrifices to God in the place where Abraham had a special revelation from God, and where he lived after offering Isaac, would have great significance to Israel.

When he approached God in Beersheba to worship, it was not a casual act on Israel's part. God quickly responded to his worship and spoke to him personally by name. "Jacob, Jacob," spoken to him in clear words, elicited an immediate response from him; "Here am I." Whenever we get a word from the Lord that is personal and suits our situation, it is of great importance that we do not hesitate to respond to Him. Fellowship with God is evident in many ways in the lives of those who belong to Him. Obedience to a call, faith that quickly responds to that call and acts upon it are ways we experience the fellowship we have when we share our lives with our God.

God gave Jacob four promises that night: He would make a great nation of Israel's seed. He would go with him to Egypt. He would bring the children of Israel out of Egypt in the future. Joseph would be with him when he died and would close his eyes. With those promises Jacob did not have to fear going to Egypt. The objective behind the journey was far more than mere survival for five more years. It was to make Israel a nation. They would learn how to establish a government and carry out the demands of those in authority. Laws would give order to the daily lives of the people of the nation who have different personalities, so they could live together in peace and with common consent to law and order.

**The Family**, v.8-27. A list of names is given to indicate any action taken by a leader affects a lot of other people. When one leads others, he needs to be sure of divine guidance. There was not question in Jacob's mind that God wanted him to go to Egypt. It is likely the "seventy" that went there, was

reflected in the fact that there were later, seventy elders in Israel, and seventy the Lord sent out to tell the children of Israel the kingdom of God was here.

**The Meeting**, v.28-30. Judah had taken the role of leadership among the sons of Jacob, so it was he who Jacob sent to Joseph before the slow-moving caravan of people and animals got to Goshen. Judah had proven to Jacob and Joseph that he could be trusted in the commitment he made to Jacob regarding Benjamin, and his changed attitude when he spoke to Joseph. He was a man who had been converted and could be trusted with important matters.

We often learn important things about ourselves when we make mistakes. The embarrassment, the pain and humiliation caused by our mistakes have an effect on ourselves and others. Lessons learned in that way are not forgotten. God has reasons for allowing us to “mess up” when we get self-assured, independent and opinionated. Judah had been given the responsibility of making the necessary arrangements for the meeting of Joseph and Jacob, and he did that well.

He would have been very gratified to see his long-lost brother reunited with his father. He was the one who had made the decision to sell Joseph as a slave to the Midianites. How good it must have been to see the joy of his father’s face when he said, “Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.” He had some years yet to live, but he was perfectly ready to die after seeing his beloved son. God’s providence, grace and truth to His people is always a wonder to us and a way He shows His interest and reveals Himself to us.

There is a great purpose behind God’s dealings with us. He intended to make a great nation of Israel. There may be a long time in our reckoning, between the time promises are given and they are fulfilled. When God promises good to His people, it is guaranteed to happen although it may be longer than we expect. There may be circumstances He uses that are hard for us to accept at times, but the outcome is positive and sure. Our faith is strengthened and our character is built and established during those times. God knows what He is doing and that is good enough for us.

The reality of God’s guidance is as precious today and as certain as it was to Jacob. When we deliberately place ourselves in the hands of God, we are assured of the reality of His guidance. The consciousness of God with us will take us confidently through hard times, stormy seas in life, times of potential fear and helplessness. He will not leave or forsake us when we abide in Him. He will guide in judgment and teach His way to those who are meek.

The wisdom of God’s love may not be easy for us to accept at first when it is tough love. But as time passes, we will see how good it was of Him to take us on the road of life He chose for us. Love fulfills promises and demonstrates itself in times of extremity and uncertainty. Our part is to have enthusiastic faith that is not short-circuited by us taking our own way. God is with us in the hard times of sorrow and suffering. At times He lets us see the light behind the clouds. He lives and loves, and will not leave or forsake His people.

## **GENESIS 47**

In order for Jacob’s family to settle in Goshen, Pharaoh had to personally give his approval. No doubt Joseph’s position and wisdom influenced that particular Pharaoh to look favorably on his request.

Previous to this Pharaoh's reign, Egypt had been in political and economic turmoil and chaos for a long time. Many of the essential projects needed to maintain normal life in Egypt, had been let go to ruin until this Pharaoh was able to reunite the opposing factions of Upper and Lower Egypt. As a result of his leadership, ability and generosity to his people, he was able to rebuild the country and develop trade with other tribal nations.

Joseph knew the kind of man the Pharaoh was, and asking for a very great favor, a place for his family in Goshen, that request was granted. When Joseph took five of his brothers with him to the interview with Pharaoh, his appeal was made carefully and thoughtfully. It for this reason he coached his brothers ahead of time as to what to say and how to say it. Israel's family, needed space to grow and still be separated from the Egyptians. Shepherds were detestable and considered to be a low caste of people to the Egyptians. The kindness of Pharaoh to God's chosen people was why God blessed him. To be liberal and considerate to the Jews is still important to God who has promised to bless those who bless Israel. He promised to bless Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and through them, the whole world.

There is a principle for us to consider as we think of the benefits a pagan king liberally gave to Jacob and his family. God blessed that king for his kindness and liberality to His chosen people. How much more should we born-again believers who already have experienced the riches of the blessings of God to us, show liberality and kindness to others. "The liberal soul shall be made fat!" Kindness shown to Israel brings blessings to the nation that gives, as well as Israel that receives. Kindness shown to God's people everywhere brings fullness and joy to those who give of what they have "as unto the Lord." "Give, and it shall be given unto you."

Joseph's faithfulness affected all his family for their good. During the time from the pit to the prison, he likely wondered what the future would bring. Instead of complaints, anger, self-pity and despair, he was faithful to God and obeyed Him by doing what he knew was right even though he was all alone. We may not always see the results of our faith nor the effects of faithfully doing the will of God, but God knows. He honors those who honor Him and that is all we need to know.

The Place where Israel and his family were allotted, was suitable to their needs and separated them from the rest of Egypt. In the lives of the Lord's people even though we live in the world, we are not of the world. We are to be separate from the sinful practices of the world system and are to avoid mixing that which is holy with unholy things and people.

**The Provision**, v.1-6. Joseph knew what would have been of a concern to Pharaoh, and told his five brothers he took with him to see Pharaoh, what to say when asked about their occupation. The request they made was granted by this monarch who was under the direction and guidance of God even though he probably didn't know that. Divine influence had given the Pharaoh a kindness and graciousness that is unusual in people in government leadership positions.

It is true that the influence of Joseph as the one who was guiding the nation through the famine, must have made Pharaoh liberal and large-hearted toward Joseph's family. During the course of our lives when we experience both good times and bad, our response is noted by those around us who may know at least some of the things we are going through. Our attitude toward circumstances, problems

and people is a fundamental part of our Christian testimony. There are some things we can explain in words, but a larger part of communication is non-verbal.

**The Presentation**, v.7-10. Jacob was obviously an old man in the eyes of Pharaoh and at the interview after the initial greeting, he wanted to know Jacob's age. It must have been a wonder to him that he had lived to one hundred thirty years and was still actively involved in the life of his family. Jacob made no claim to personal success as the reason for long life. Abraham had lived one hundred seventy-five years and Isaac one hundred eighty years. Israel had seventeen more years in Goshen before he died.

Courtesy and honor given to whom honor is due, opens the way to a meaningful conversation. When meeting a person, the first few seconds, forms an impression that affects the whole interview. In fact, those in business who hire employees, often make the decision to hire a person or not, in the first minute of an interview. That likely holds true when we witness for the Lord regarding our faith and salvation. Facial expressions, body language and the tone of voice all leave "first impressions" that don't go away.

When at all possible, use every opportunity to be a blessing to others and express appreciation and gratitude in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. As representatives of our Lord, our role, calls for more than a casual, "God bless you," to saying something specific and relevant to the ones we meet. Jacob represented his God, the God who had made a covenant with his forefathers and with him. There is a dignity that is appropriate to one's position in life as well as one's age. It is offensive for an old person to try to dress, act or be like a teenager or young person.

**For Protection**, v.11-12. Joseph was able to do what Pharaoh had told him without being charged with showing favor to his own family. Nepotism is offensive to people when we show favor to our own people at the expense or loss of others. We do have a right and responsibility to care for and protect our families and our "little ones." Joseph had promised to take care of his brothers and their families in Egypt and he was able to carry out that promise during the five years of famine that were yet to come.

The simplicity of God's protection was to simply do what was obvious. Circumstances meant they had to leave where they were and they were directed to go to the best place possible. There didn't have to be maneuvering or manipulation like had been Jacob's previous practice. They likely expected to be in Egypt for a relatively short time, but God was in control and that was all that mattered.

Everyday life is something we generally get quite used to. We have set times and habits we follow from the time we get up in the morning until we go to bed at night. We get comfortable with routines and don't like them to get upset. However, a seemingly insignificant detail that is unexpected can change the whole course of our life in a very short time. A letter or phone call, a conversation or an event can make something we never expected, to be an obvious act of God that brings about a change in our life and future. Nothing happens to us as God's people, unless it is directed by divine providence. When we accept something that happens to us as from the Lord and as His will for us, we have the assurance that His wisdom and love will be in control of everything.

The value of hard work whether manual or mental is not only a noble responsibility and privilege, but it also is God's will for us. Work is an essential privilege that gives glory and purpose to our life. The capacity and opportunity to work, whether it is tending sheep and cattle, or people, is worthy of our best efforts to maintain ourselves and our family and bless others. There is honor in hard work and honest labor. People who don't work are often unhappy, unfulfilled, unfaithful to their families and unfit citizens of society. Our daily calling gives personal meaning to our lives and is a fitting representation of our Master who we serve with love and devotion to duty.

The blessings of family life are not just in making us feel good and making us comfortable. Other people may look at us as "lower class" because of the menial labor we do or the lack of wealth our occupations brings. To many people, a rural life is looked down on, but they don't know the benefit of parents and children working together while life-skills and ethics are being taught when sharing labor. The Egyptians looked down on shepherds, but looked to Joseph the son of a shepherd for their very survival. Joseph openly identified himself with his family who he loved in spite of all that happened to him.

Whatever differences may come in families, whether it be position, wealth, fame or how a person is known publicly, family life should be nurtured, promoted and never allowed to become impaired because of differences. Families are God's original social structure, and when families are strong, nations are strong. When family structure breaks down in nations, the nation will not survive very long.

Ordinary life is significant to those who count in our sphere of influence. How I live, act, conduct myself and my attitude toward life and other people, will affect my family, business associates and those who know me. Our present life is like a pilgrimage. It is a journey with some stopping places where we are for a while and then we move on. Under the storms of stress, persecution and troubles, our attitudes of hope and cheer will create an expectation and hope in other believers.

### **WISDOM IS NEEDED IN CRISIS TIMES**

Joseph was a son and a brother, but he was also a public official upon whom the nation of Egypt depended. He did not let his domestic blessings interfere with his public responsibilities. God placed him in that position. The policies of Egypt and Israel were different then and they still are today. Joseph's role as a statesman and an administrator gives us a little insight into how different nations function even though national identity is very different.

Joseph's plan was to take the necessary steps before the famine came, and claim authority over property and the individuals. Money was used until it became useless and was all gone. Possessions and property were more than the collateral used to maintain life. Finally, personal labor was used as an exchange for food. The Egyptian population had no choice but to accept the agenda Joseph laid out so they could survive. By the time the famine was over, the government owned the land, the assets, and the people. The people used their skills and strength for the common good of all in order to get through the famine.

The wisdom of Joseph's plan was not an injustice because the government of Egypt was not "by the people for the people." It was a monarchy in which the population became tenants, not slaves. The

taxes imposed were reasonable and maintainable. Instead of being independent landowners who depended on themselves for survival, they accepted Joseph's plan and were thankful for it.

This plan resulted in the protection and survival of the country. Lives were saved, the influence of the country was likely extended, the benevolent Pharaoh did not abuse his authority, and yet was able to maintain the power of the nation as united entity. Those who perhaps may have wanted to take over the leadership of the country, would have found themselves depending on the present government for survival just like everyone else.

There are some things we learn from this narrative that are essential in maintaining life as it should be. Act with discretion, foresight and wisdom when challenged with the issues of life including life or death matters. We need to think through the pros and cons of decisions and match our assets to our obligations. Taking the time needed to make wise decisions is not necessarily a sign of weakness or uncertainty. Rather, it is needed to avoid the consequences of lack of sound judgment. Making snap decisions generally will mean the whole thing will have to be repeated after cleaning up the mess made by not going to the Lord for divine wisdom.

When a conclusion is reached, take action promptly rather than second-guess or vacillate over a sound, prayerful and thoughtful decision. A person who is living for God and is in fellowship with Him, knows that it is essential to trust God to produce the right results. Faith waits on the Lord for guidance and then acts with confidence in the Lord, His power and His goodness.

Act with thoroughness and do what you do as unto the Lord and not unto men. The purpose behind a decision and the necessity of acting promptly, leads one who is responsible for the welfare of others, to put a whole-hearted effort into the work. Troubles follow useless and hopeless work that is only half-done.

It is God who works in you to do as to the Lord, what you do for people. From Him comes the ability to do what is needed and the wisdom to do it right. If we lack wisdom, we can ask for it from God. When we need guidance, the Spirit and word of God are available to us at all times. When we need power to accomplish the work, our Lord gives that needed strength. He has "all power in heaven and earth."

Our up-to-date relationship with God is what is needed to succeed in any work He gives us. Our mind, emotions and will ought to show that we are working under divine guidance even when there maybe much to discourage us. A Christian can be successful in business and also in their Christian life and testimony but we must not measure the proof of our Christianity by secular success. Christianity is not a barrier to being successful, and brains and righteousness are not incompatible. Goodness and successfulness do not need to cancel each other out.

When we use our intellectual abilities to their fullest and are willing to serve God, a person can glorify God, lead people, benefit a nation and at the same time be humble. True-in-heart to the Lord and humbled-mindedness, work well together. Grace, determination and willingness to work are features to having a real abundant life and fulfilling our role as a responsible person. A person of principle will be affective in every part of life by desiring to glorify God and do what we do "as unto the Lord."



We learn the point and principles of living when the practice of doing it for the Lord is true. Other people who know us and whom we influence, will likely be blessed by the example they can see. We will learn for ourselves the reason for which we are alive, as well as the meaning of life itself in view of all that is past and the unfolding of the future. We are not here in the world just to be a believer who has put faith in Christ and knows we are saved. We are here to live out that faith. What we do when we are young is just as important as to how we die when we are old. What we live for, who we live for, is so important, that people who know us will have an indelible impression on their minds that is going to be awakened every time they hear our name mentioned in the future.

## **GENESIS 48**

### **THE SUNSET COMES**

Some years had passed and Jacob was sick. He knew his life was soon going to end and he had some loose ends to tie up. When Joseph went to see his father, he took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, with him. Jacob then gave Joseph the blessing of the firstborn. It had been the practice of most people to give the firstborn in a family, a double portion of the inheritance that was passed on to the family. In an unusual way Jacob did that by claiming Manasseh and Ephraim as his sons in the place of Joseph. Instead of the tribe being called the tribe of Joseph, his two sons each became equal in sonship with Joseph's brothers. Joseph did receive the double portion.

As the book of Genesis draws to a close, the story of Joseph recedes. The historical narrative of God's dealing with His chosen people with whom He made a covenant, with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is picked up again and focuses on Jacob. The family/tribe that would some-day become a nation, had survived the testing time. "The reward of the inheritance" had been passed on through the actions of divine grace.

The course of life is made up of routine daily living, interspersed with outstanding events that remain indelibly impressed on our minds. Believers in our Lord Jesus Christ remember with joy and thankfulness the time the Lord saved them. Often events around that time are easily recalled as well. We remember other special times like marriage, the birth of children, special holidays and special people who came into our lives and with whom we formed special bonds. As we draw nearer to death-day, we become conscious of things left undone that can be done to be a spiritual benefit to other people. When those things come to mind, make haste to do what we are led by God to do while we are still able.

"It is appointed unto man once to die," and when that inevitable event comes to us, we need to be sure all is in order with our family. Don't leave them with a lot of unfinished business and unanswered questions. God has been faithful to us. It is only right that we be faithful to those around us. Not everyone will have the time and strength to do what is needed at the very end of life, so it is important to do what we can well in advance of our death.

Jacob had made arrangements for his burial so there was no question as to where he would be buried and who would carry out his request. Joseph knew he was given that responsibility. When all the arrangements were made, then Israel worshipped. What a wonderful way to end one's life – as a worshipper of God!

**An Important Decision**, v.1-7. When Joseph and his sons came to see Jacob in his sickness, he was able to rouse himself and sit up on the bed. He recalled the time he met God at Bethel and his life was changed because he was changed. He remembered the promises of God. Then he made the startling announcement of an important decision. Joseph's two sons would become Israel's sons and would share equally in the inheritance of the promised land. Any other children Joseph might have would be his own, but Manasseh and Ephraim would be sons included in the covenant promises of God.

What would these two young men raised in a place of power and plenty in Egypt have to say about becoming included as sons of an ancient shepherd who lived in Goshen separated from the rest of Egypt because they were shepherds? Joseph must have done a good job of instructing his sons as to who they were in the sight of God and in relation to their heritage. They would be the first ones who would leave the high hopes of a lifetime in Egypt and move out to Goshen. They would learn a whole new way of life, lived with new people, a new occupation and a new culture. Joseph would have made sure they knew that faith in God was a fundamental part of being alive with a purpose in living.

It is important for God's people to make sure our children know what is important in their lives. They need to understand the things that are seen are only temporary. It is the things that are not seen that last because they are eternal. Young people need to hear from their parents the story of their forefathers and the heritage that has been passed on to them. They need to know how we have been saved by God's grace and why we believe what we believe, and why we do what we do. Don't leave children and grandchildren in the dark as to what is important. Then they are responsible to make the important decision themselves that will affect their lives, their destiny and their children.

In a touching comment, Israel told them about the passing away of his beloved wife, Rachel, their grandmother. That would have impacted Joseph who was only a young boy when she died. He would have had vague memories of his mother, but he knew his father honored her and his memories of life with her. Our children need to hear from our lips that we appreciate, love, cherish and revere the memories of our spouse. We don't have to wait until after they die to tell our family this. The bonds of love we have with our spouse and with our parents before us, need to be told, so our children make the right choices themselves when the time comes to make important decisions.

**A Special Blessing**, v.8-16. Jacob was glad to see Joseph and his two sons although he couldn't see well. God had given him a special blessing when after twenty years thinking Joseph was dead, he now saw him in the flesh. Seventeen years later he sees Joseph's grown sons, and proceeded to bless them. Again, there is a special blessing. Ephraim received the special blessing of leadership that was commonly given to the oldest son. God was asked to bless them spiritually and temporally. By being brought into Jacob's family, the future promised blessing on Israel as a people and ultimately as a nation, would be theirs. Spiritual blessing was on them and still is even though the children of Israel are temporarily dispersed throughout the world.

**A Specific Choice**, v.17-22. Through the whole book of Genesis, it is a feature that often the firstborn was passed over. Seth over Cain, Shem over Japheth, Abraham instead of Haran, Isaac instead of Ishmael, Jacob instead of Esau and Ephraim instead of Manasseh. God is sovereign and does not necessarily follow the pattern of privilege that is common to people. God chooses the weak things to

confound the mighty. He chooses those who are despised to negate the authority of those who lead in the ways of the world.

After Joseph heard his father's explanation for putting Ephraim before Manasseh, he accepted that without further comment. He would know that Reuben had been passed by. Joseph himself, the second youngest son, was the leader. Israel was about to die and he wanted Joseph in his role as the son with authority, to know that God was sovereign and would do as he promised. Also, he wanted Joseph to know that he had double portions in the land of promise: one through Ephraim and one through Manasseh.

The choices we make in life will often be fulfilled in those who come after us. Results of efforts put forth in the work of God may never be seen in our lifetime. Later, we may learn of blessings that came as a result of the labor years before by those who were here before us. That may be seen in families also. Therefore, we should not allow ourselves to be discouraged when we do not see in our children and grandchildren what we had hoped for. But the whole history is not yet complete and we take courage in the words, "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days."

### **A MODEL FOR OLD AGE**

Faith looks upward to God as the things of earth fade into insignificance and misty memories. One thing remains clear as we look ahead, and that is our faith in God remains unchanged. We remember what God has done and what He has promised. In God's word we still find the spiritual food and encouragement we need. As we read the scriptures, we are inspired and empowered to trust God without question. God has been faithful to us all these years that we have lived by faith in Him. There has been, and still is, real joy when we rest on what God's word says.

Gratitude looks backward to all the way by which he led me. Our life is a pilgrimage through the world on our way home. All that really matters is that God has been with us all the way and has been, and still is, everything to us. I can personally testify that the God of my fathers is my God. They walked before Him and our life has been a walk before Him. He has been a shepherd to me all the way, every day and He has guided and protected me. He has redeemed me and preserved me from evil. Reviewing the journey enables us to see with gratitude, the ways of the Lord when the days were dark and the nights were gloomy. There have been far more times when He has been with us, when the light of life shone brightly and glory was seen.

Love looks outward toward those around us who are starting their lives with God, and that moves us to pray for them, that God will bless them and use them in His service. Affection for those who are new in Christ prompts us to pray for them and do what we think is best for them. We pray God will be with them and guide them every step of the way through life. We are sure that God's love is directed toward them, as well as our feeble human love.

Hope looks onward to the future with expectation and confidence in the fact that the promises of God are "Yea and Amen." Such hope is a fundamental part of being a Christian. It motivates our faith and love, to rise to every challenge that might come. One wrote, "Faith looks upward. Hope looks onward. Faith accepts. Hope expects." Faith is concerned with the present promises. Hope is concerned with the things promised. Faith appropriates, hope anticipates. Faith is occupied with the past and present. Hope lives in the future.

At the end of life, all of these characteristics blend into a peaceful life consciousness of the presence of God with us now, confidence of the promises of God ahead, and calm in the peace of God – and we are at rest!

## **GENESIS 49**

### **THE PROPHECIES OF JACOB**

The thoughts of Jacob about each of his sons must have come from God who knows the heart of every person. He also knows what is going to happen to each person in the future because He holds the future in His hand. In this chapter the focus is on Jacob as his sons gather to hear his final words. Jacob's blessings were really more like prophecies about the destiny of each of the tribes although some of what was said is kind of obscure.

A lesson for us from the blessings/prophecies of this chapter is that what we do today can have a lasting effect on our future. The choices we make and the attitude we have toward God, others and ourselves, have consequences that we cannot avoid. We do have the power to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. It is important for young people to learn early in life, how to control their thoughts and practice righteous conduct. The training of children and the guidance and advice we give as they get older, is in view of them living a full and purposeful life for the Lord. Good or bad habits have consequences in how we live, how we speak and how we think. These are what we live and die with.

This chapter also closes the time of the patriarchs as the prophecies of Jacob look ahead to the nation that was going to come from the twelve tribes of Israel. It was a very important occasion as Jacob called them together and gave foresight into the future. Their conduct and practice in their past affected the future of their children and the generations that followed. We do reap what we sow.

**The Certainty.** Halfway between the time of God's promise of the Savior coming from the seed of Abraham, to the time Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, was when Jacob's prophecies were given. In Egypt at the start of a four-hundred-year stay, these appropriate words of truth based on the character traits of Jacob's sons, were openly stated.

**The Accuracy.** Reuben's descendants were characterized by his indecision and instability. The treachery of Simeon and Levi was evident by the anger, cruelty and violence that they held with religious zeal. Evil done in the name of good is not good. Judah was given the right of leadership that Reuben, Simeon and Levi who were older than he, could not give. From the seed of Judah came our Lord Jesus Christ who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Sovereignty is associated with Judah. To serve as a ruler is to lead, and to lead is to bless those who follow. The dominion and rule of our Lord will fulfill all the promises of God to the patriarchs.

Characteristic of Zebulun whose tribe settled near the Mediterranean Sea, was opportunity. They were able to take from the bounty of the sea and profit from it. Opportunity comes in one way or another to all of us. Those who are wise will seize opportunities when they arise. Issachar yielded to a life of servitude because of timidity. He was content to bear burdens for others rather than take initiative himself and the exertion that commitment calls for. It is easy to be content with a quiet life free from

responsibility. In that way everything that goes wrong is someone else's fault. If something is good, that person can say, "Good for them. Just leave me alone." That attitude does not promote what is right and true.

The subtily of Dan was that of a shrewd troublemaker. Cunning deception has all the characteristics of "that old serpent, the devil." Spiritual cunning on the part of those whose purpose is to deceive, is about as low as one can get. Gad had setbacks but overcame obstacles even when pressures and having to endure hardships. Victory comes to those who are faithful and persevere. The name, Asher means "blessed." Real blessing is intended to be used for service and to bring blessing to others. Hopefully, through them blessing will continue to expand. Naphtali seemed to emphasize the need of significant activity. Active participation in meaningful activity leads to a happy, safe and interesting life. It is good to be "zealous of good works."

Joseph was characterized by fruitfulness in his life that was like a tree whose branches extend beyond normal boundaries. That spiritual fruit will benefit many beyond our scope of activity and will give spiritual direction to others we may never know. A life of spiritual direction and commitment to the Lord, will enable us to bear fruit for our Lord that will remain. Eternal life as a gift from God will bring praise and glory to Him and blessings to all who accept that gift. Branches that "go over the wall," provides benefits for those who pass by and reach out on their own to take what they see is there before them.

Benjamin appears to have been considered a fighter who needed to have the ability and agility to deal with any task or opposition that may come. We need to "be ready" to give an account of the hope that is in us, and to testify to the grace of God that we have personally experienced.

All of these character-traits suggest to us the necessity of making sure our ability and power come from God, not the flesh. An overpowering personality, or an acquiescent personality has to be changed to suit the calling God gives us. Character makes the person, and our Lord makes the character we have.

### **LAST WORDS**

If we are near our loved ones when they pass away, we often remember their final words. Jacob's final words as he went over each one of his sons' names, would have made some of them concerned and perplexed, and others of them relieved. Jacob's affection for each one of them hadn't changed, but he was wise enough to know that what he saw in them was a character trait.

At the closing scene of Jacob's life when he gave his final counsel, his last blessing and his last charge to his sons, he pulled his feet up into his bed and died. He had been able to retain the strength to do what he had to do. Then he released his strong will to the Lord and he left his body. There will always be felt loss when loved ones pass away. The feelings of love that has developed over the years between husband and wife, and parents and children, doesn't go away. Sorrows and conflicts, blessings and happy events we have shared in life, put an indelible print on our minds. Our emotions don't leave us when a loved one passes away. Those emotions remain and have to be dealt with and lived with. By cherishing our memories and filling our lives with other meaningful things and people, those blank spots are not the center of our minds. Blank spots can't be filled with something different

but when we make room for other things and people, those empty places don't have the same power to control us.

After Jacob was gone, the mourning time went on for a long time. His sons carried out his commands to bury him in Canaan with his fathers. Even though the famine had long since passed, the sons of Jacob returned to Egypt instead of staying in the land of promise. God was not finished with the training necessary to make of them a nation, and other generations that followed had to learn who God was and who they were. Training time in a believer's life goes on every day. Things we have learned and taught, will hopefully be taught by those who are the next generation, to the one following them.

Any training takes time. Spiritual training is no exception. We can study, pass exams, have a diploma in some field of endeavor, and still not be ready for the service of the Lord. The power of faith has to be evident. When one's mind and heart are occupied with God, His grace, His promises and His will, God can begin to use us. We will be able to pass on to others, not just information we have learned, but the benefit of experience when we practice what we have learned. In that way our faith is a reality that is able to be seen by those who will learn from us.

There is a unique glory in love that can settle disputes, despair, disappointments and discouragement. When a person leaves us, they are "gathered to his people." There is the expectation of a reunion with those who have gone before us. Recognition is implied when we read of those who the Lord takes home to heaven. Revelation of what has been hidden from us, is an inspiration to look forward in hope. The grave is just an outpost to remind others that "the grave is not the goal." The resurrection of our bodies is coming, and that fact transforms our lives now, so that we are motivated to live in view of our life after death.

## **GENESIS 50**

### **TO MOURN IS NORMAL**

It is appropriate to deal with grief rather than pretend we are unmoved by the passing away of a loved one. To mourn the loss of one with whom we shared life is normal. They were with us for years and then are permanently gone. We weep over what we have lost rather than for what they have lost. Those who have eternal life, go to heaven when they die. In order for those left behind to live without fixating on the loss, we need to talk about the person who lived here and by sharing our feelings, emotions and memories with others, we are able to get relief.

Joseph took the vow he made to his father to bury him in Canaan seriously, and requested leave from Pharaoh to carry out his vow. A large company of Egyptians as well as Jacob's sons went to publicly mourn Jacob's passing for seven days "beyond the Jordan." Then he was buried in the cave of Machpelah. This was the kind of funeral that was held for important leaders in those days. When we are asked to do something and we promise to do it, that is the same as a vow. Make promises wisely, not just "off the cuff," and honor your promises faithfully.

### **REASSURANCE**

After the death of Jacob, Joseph was the real leader of the family of Israel. He was committed to taking care of the lives and welfare of his brothers. For all the years they had lived in Egypt, they still did not trust Joseph or believe his word regarding his forgiveness of them. They apparently thought he

was like them. They harbored resentment for years and would not let it go. Weak, unprincipled people find it hard to believe there is goodness in other people. Guilt is a hard master when we allow it to fester in our minds.

No wonder Joseph wept! His brothers must have misunderstood him before and didn't trust him – and they had not changed. They implied that Joseph's intention for all those years was to wait until Jacob died and then get even with them. They even doubted his testimony that he made to them years before that God had sent him ahead of them to arrange for their survival. They had meant evil to happen to Joseph; God had meant good to happen through Joseph to them. They had schemed but God had overruled their sin.

Forgiveness sometimes is misunderstood. Lack of trust in a person's words deaden a normal response and make a person bitter. Ungrounded suspicion is hard to bear when a sincere action on behalf of others has been on-going, and when words of forgiveness have been misconstrued and are not accepted as the truth.

When one's intentions are doubted and explanations are misinterpreted, we have two choices. We can try to explain things again, or we can just go forward and show the love of our Lord Jesus Christ by proving what we said by what we do. God's grace to us makes it possible for us to show grace to others.

Faith in God makes it possible to do what we could not do in our own strength. Our commitments to people are backed up by our faith and commitment to our Lord. Faith enables us to do our duty with a good spirit when there are obstacles and misunderstandings. To walk humbly with God and be true to Him first, gives Him a reason to honor those who honor Him.

Joseph made his relatives promise to take him to Canaan to be buried when they all moved back there. Likely none of them ever thought it would be four hundred years before that promise was kept. Genesis begins with God giving life and ends with Joseph's death and his body in a coffin in Egypt. The act of faith in Joseph's life that is mentioned in Hebrews 11, has to do with him assuring others they would eventually go back to the promised land.

Faith has different ways it can be seen. Jacob thought of the past and his burial. Joseph thought of the future and his burial. Jacob looked back and implied, "Don't forget where you came from." Joseph looked ahead and implied, "Don't forget where you are going." Promises are vows that are to be kept and they also inspire hope when times are tough. That hope is sure that deliverance will come.

The book of Genesis reminds us of the perpetual, permanent, persistent plans and purposes of God. It begins with God creating and moves on to how human sin has "passed upon all men." The human race as a whole, ignored God and so when He started over after the flood, He chose to deal with one man of faith and then his family. It is from this whole book we learn what is wrong with people and what to expect when we choose sin over salvation. We also learn how God has provided a remedy for sin.

Through it all, we can learn God rules in justice and righteousness. He is real, He is the supreme authority of the universe and His-story is the message of the Bible. "Eyes have not seen, nor ears heard, neither has it entered the heart of man the things God has prepared for those who love Him."

“Thou will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusts in Thee.”  
“Trust in the Lord forever!”